

Know No Doubt

Honesty

Decisions, Decisions

July–September 2009

verticalthought®

a magazine of understanding for tomorrow's leaders

Staying
Positive
in a Negative
World



Answers From
Genesis Part 5

Where Vampires
and Werewolves
Don't Exist

The Story of the Stars

Summer Camp—in Africa

**When a Friend
Lets You Down**

Vantage Point

If you've ever hiked or driven through the mountains, you've probably come to a spot providing a good vantage point from which to see your surroundings. Here you're afforded a panoramic view of where you've been and where you're going. There may even be a sign at such a spot giving a comprehensive or overall perspective.

Starting with this issue of *Vertical Thought* we've decided to call the personal letter from the editor on this page "Vantage Point." The name ties in with the vertical thinking (about God) we promote and conveys what I like to share within this space—an overall perspective on one or more of the major themes of the current issue.

Now that you understand the name, let me share a few thoughts with you about the issue you are now viewing.

As we began planning the articles, two major issues seemed to stand out in the news and weighed heavily on the minds of our staff. First, there was the foreboding sense of pessimism that seems to be affecting much of the world due to the present worldwide financial crisis.

The downturn in the global economy is having a negative effect on many. Your grandparents and parents may be angry that their retirement savings have lost approximately half of their value. Some have lost almost all of their wealth and also their jobs. Many are worried about how they'll survive. And the discouragement continues, as no one knows how long it will be before the economy recovers.

Young people are also hit by the financial devastation. Some have to choose less expensive schools at which to continue their educations. Some have to borrow more money for school, and others simply won't be able to go to college at all.

In addition to the financial troubles, our world is also plagued with diplomatic tensions, corrupt governments and heartless terrorism. There are

plenty of reasons to be down.

In the face of these sad realities, how can we be positive? In our lead article "The World's a Mess: Can You Be Positive?" we provide three important reasons why Christians can and should be positive about the future.

The second issue our staff felt compelled to address was honesty. A national survey released last December by the Josephson Institute for Ethics indicated that cheating was on the rise in U.S. high schools. A staggering 64 percent of the 30,000 students who participated in the survey admitted they had cheated on a test during the last year. Reports indicate that problems with student cheating also exist in countries outside the United States.

There is an obvious connection between cheating and our current economic crisis. The former led to the latter.

Cheating is no longer an isolated incident involving only a few people. It's now become the norm. Some think that young people are simply following the example of their elders who also cheat in business, on their taxes and in their relationships.

What many are beginning to realize is that there is an obvious connection between cheating and our current economic crisis. The former led to the latter. In these troubled times, vertical thinkers have a great opportunity to let their positive outlooks and honest conduct shine.



Vertical Thought is a biblically based magazine of understanding for young people aged 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. © 2009 United Church of God, an International Association. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited.

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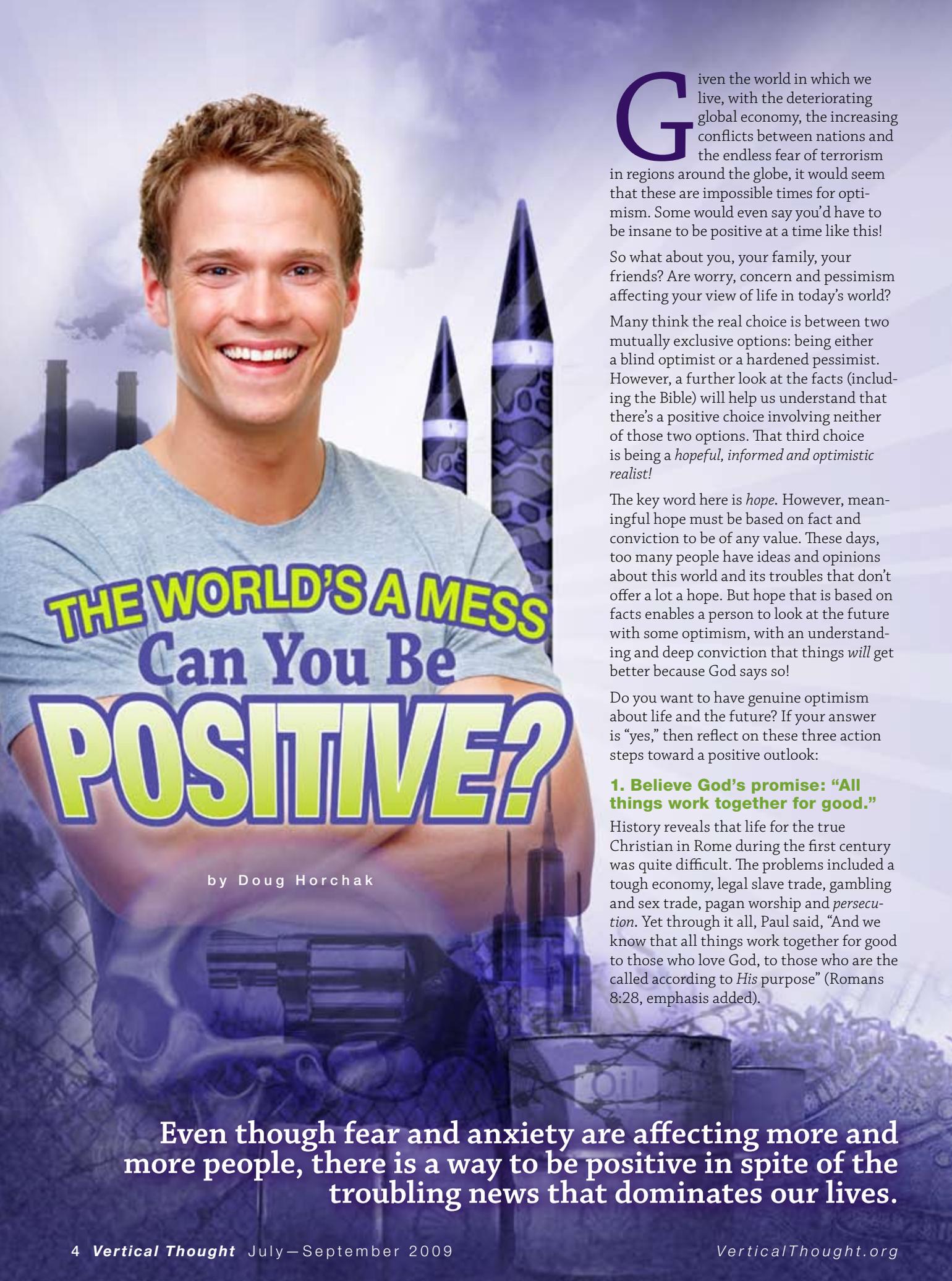
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THE WORLD'S A MESS
Can You Be
POSITIVE?

by Doug Horchak

Even though fear and anxiety are affecting more and more people, there is a way to be positive in spite of the troubling news that dominates our lives.

Given the world in which we live, with the deteriorating global economy, the increasing conflicts between nations and the endless fear of terrorism in regions around the globe, it would seem that these are impossible times for optimism. Some would even say you'd have to be insane to be positive at a time like this!

So what about you, your family, your friends? Are worry, concern and pessimism affecting your view of life in today's world?

Many think the real choice is between two mutually exclusive options: being either a blind optimist or a hardened pessimist. However, a further look at the facts (including the Bible) will help us understand that there's a positive choice involving neither of those two options. That third choice is being a *hopeful, informed and optimistic realist!*

The key word here is *hope*. However, meaningful hope must be based on fact and conviction to be of any value. These days, too many people have ideas and opinions about this world and its troubles that don't offer a lot of hope. But hope that is based on facts enables a person to look at the future with some optimism, with an understanding and deep conviction that things *will* get better because God says so!

Do you want to have genuine optimism about life and the future? If your answer is "yes," then reflect on these three action steps toward a positive outlook:

1. Believe God's promise: "All things work together for good."

History reveals that life for the true Christian in Rome during the first century was quite difficult. The problems included a tough economy, legal slave trade, gambling and sex trade, pagan worship and *persecution*. Yet through it all, Paul said, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose" (Romans 8:28, emphasis added).

Revealing why he was so positive, Paul cited God's promise of a better future (Romans 8:18-25). Considering the difficult times in which we now live, God also says to us (as Paul did to the church at Rome) that there is *hope*. God promises a *better future*. But what is behind that promise?

2. Discover that the future will be better—not worse!

God's Word shows us that we live in a world with an immediate future that isn't pretty. Look around, and you'll see the evidence everywhere.

Almost 2,000 years ago on the Mount of Olives, on the east side of Jerusalem, Jesus Christ told His disciples that in our generation man's troubles would increase: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:21-22). This is a pretty nasty description.

God's Word also reveals that much of humanity's efforts to solve its problems will, in the *short term*, end in failure. While current efforts to prop up the worldwide financial system might work in the short term, the longer range prospects are not good.

But here's the key: The Bible also reveals that the return of Jesus Christ will take place to clean up the mess! His arrival will usher in the only hope for humanity being saved from itself. The apostle Paul refers to Jesus Christ as "our hope" in 1 Timothy 1:1. The hope that Jesus Christ will bring is that of a new government based on the spiritual laws of God, administered by those whom God calls now, in this life.

Imagine... a utopia of real peace! The prophet Isaiah was allowed to see, in vision, the beginning stages of this divine government in action.

In Isaiah 2:2-3 we read: "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that

Some would even say you'd be insane to be positive at a time like this.

the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."

Think about a time in the future when most people will *choose* to obey laws that will lead to cooperation and peace. This will be a time when most will seek understanding and direction from their Creator about His law and its application to life. What a change that will be!

The Bible also shows that the nations will eventually choose to learn and apply the way of peace. They will no longer teach the way of greed or practice the carnage of human violence that has defined humanity's efforts to solve its problems over the millennia.

As the prophet Isaiah explains, "He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4).

3. Remember God's promise: "I'll never leave you!"

In the midst of our world's troubles—economic failure, terrorism, disease, social unrest and moral decadence—God promises to be with us. In Hebrews 13:5-6 we read, "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'"

The Bible also tells us that when evil comes, God will see us through. As the prophet Isaiah revealed to ancient Israel, "In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you" (Isaiah 54:14).

The same is true for us today. God can protect us, and we need not fear! So our ability to reap true *hope* and *optimism* is based on our personal efforts to understand and live God's way!

The future of mankind is hopeful! There is much to be thankful for! While the darkness before the dawn may be sobering, God has a plan that is more optimistic than anyone could imagine! To read more about this hope-filled future, read or request our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom* at www.gnmmagazine.org/booklets.

Though we live in this troubled world, we don't have to be troubled in mind or heart. There is a way of life that provides joy, happiness and real hope for the future. Don't become overly fearful about the troubling events in the world that you cannot control. Take advantage of the opportunities God gives you to understand His plan and serve Him. Believe God's promise to His people:

"Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid... for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6).

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

While the darkness before the dawn may be sobering, God has a plan that is more optimistic than anyone could imagine!

Choosing to Cheat

Everyone seems to be doing it, so it's not really a problem to cheat in school, is it?

by Ken Treybig

You've done well in your college classes and established a solid grade point average. You've started working a few extra hours to help cover your rising bills, joined a few extracurricular programs that will look good on your résumé and are feeling overextended and overworked.

Your degree is in engineering, so your literature class doesn't seem that relevant. And studying hard for the final will cut into your study time for your more difficult engineering classes. You find out that an advance copy of the lit final is available for sale from a friend of a friend. No one is hurt by that, so surely it won't hurt anything if you buy a copy and save a little time. You don't have anything to lose. Or do you?

was placed on academic probation and required to write this essay. In ways, I feel very fortunate, since my probation will end provided I maintain a clean record and honest academic performance in the future.

"However, I also feel ashamed because I behaved dishonestly and have given my instructors and the administration the impression that I am unethical. Also, I have damaged my own academic record and must work hard in order to redeem myself and prove my honesty as a student" ("The Causes and Consequences of Cheating," *The Daily Californian*, May 6, 2005).

The student went on to explain that universities often take a strict stance on cheating, with punishments ranging from an F in the course to expulsion from school, possibly delaying or ruining one's academic career or eventual professional career.

The Bible repeatedly instructs us to maintain complete truthfulness and avoid dishonest gain. Another principle to remember is that a good name and reputation are very precious and should be guarded carefully. As Proverbs 22:1 says, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches."

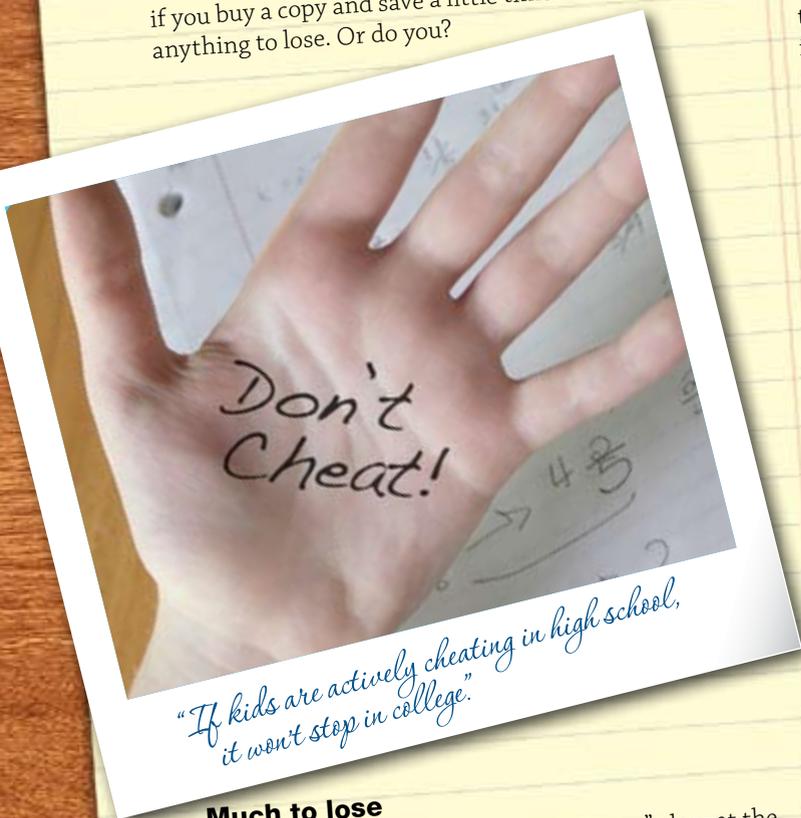
Ecclesiastes 10:1 graphically portrays the violation of this principle: "Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor; so does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor."

Once your good name is associated with something that stinks, it takes a lot of hard work to get rid of the smell. I learned many years ago that the odor of a skunk's spray is very hard to eradicate. Cheating is like playing with a frightened skunk, exposing your good name to the line of fire.

Indiscretions don't always disappear

You might think that a college indiscretion would get buried in the past. However, an article from the student paper of the University of Oregon points out that while student conduct records are normally sealed, those seeking acceptance to graduate school or the American Bar Association generally sign waivers that allow for background checks—including examination of student conduct records.

It goes on to say that even cheating that isn't caught has negative consequences. When someone cheats, he (or she) cheapens the huge investment he's made in his



Much to lose

In 2005 a student cheated on a "non-core" class at the University of California Berkeley and found out he had a lot to lose. In his own words: "I thought I needed a bit of an advantage in order to get through the final exam and leave the course with a good grade, and I believed that I could get away with it ...

"Instead, my plans backfired. After being caught and confronted (which was the instructor's responsibility), I

education—because he hasn't really learned. In addition, it reflects on the whole university and cheapens each student's ability to market himself because word may spread that graduates from that institution don't have the knowledge or skills they're supposed to have.

According to a poll conducted by the Josephson Institute for Ethics in December 2008, cheating has become widespread in the United States.

The poll focused on lying, stealing and cheating at 100 randomly selected high schools and found that 64 percent of students said they cheated on a test at least once last year. More than half of that group (38 percent of the total) said they had cheated two or more times last year (Chelsea Keenan, "Survey Reveals Prevalence of Cheating Among High School Students," *The Independent Florida Alligator*, Dec. 2, 2008).

Seeds are sown early

Yet cheating doesn't normally start in college or high school. As Tyler, Texas, elementary administrator and teacher Walter Perez states: "I have observed that many times the first cheating is done at an early age by having their older siblings or parents do their assignments. Somebody told me that the people who drove the [U.S.] economy into the ground had two things in common—greed and everybody attended kindergarten. No matter what business school they attended, along the way they became convinced that cheating was okay."

His point was that what begins in elementary school continues through a person's life. Linda Behar-Horenstein, a University of Florida professor from the College of Education's Department of Educational Administration and Policy, agrees. She said, "If kids are actively cheating in high school, it won't stop in college. It's an ethical and moral dilemma."

From cheating on tests it moves into cheating on résumés—even in the academic world. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology online edition of *The Tech* posted a May 4, 2007, story ("Marilee Jones Did Receive Degree") about a former MIT admissions dean who admitted lying about her academic credentials.

The article states that MIT asked Jones to resign because she falsely claimed three degrees she didn't have. Apparently she went to a smaller, lesser-known college and did not want to list that one when she first applied for a job at MIT in 1979.

David Callahan, in his 2004 book *The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans Are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead*, says that people begin to excuse their own cheating by saying "everyone else is doing it." He describes a society that

cheats at school, at work, in amateur and professional sports, on taxes, in the news media and in the medical profession.

He describes attorneys cheating to get into the best schools and later padding their hours to stay competitive with colleagues. He says people are encouraged to cheat in a competitive society where rich cheaters are given only a slap on the wrist if they've increased profits for their company.

Coping in an untruthful world

How does a vertical thinking person cope with feelings that he or she will never get ahead in a crooked world? That was the cry of a famous poet thousands of years ago. In Psalm 73:3 Asaph said, "I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." He described them as living what appeared to be "the good life" while he struggled. He said it was very painful for him until he got his mind focused on God and the long term.

In verse 17 he said, "Then I understood their end." He pointed out that the wicked are "set ... in slippery places" and "cast ... down to destruction" (verse 18) while those who trust in and are faithful to God will be guided by God and afterward will be received by Him with honor (verse 24).

Many today seem to think honesty and integrity are *little things* that don't matter. But they matter to God. Jesus said, "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much" (Luke 16:10).

Like so many other areas of life, it comes down to what you value. Is it more important to you to get ahead for a short time in this temporary physical existence—or to receive the lasting riches of eternal life? The apostle Paul illustrated this point by contrasting the efforts an athlete expends to win a crown of braided tree branches with the effort we should expend to be awarded a reward that is eternal (1 Corinthians 9:24-25).

Look at things from a higher and more long-range perspective. Don't be swept up with the stink of a culture chasing short-term gratification. Resist the urge to take shortcuts to gain a quick but false advantage in life—whether it's with schoolwork or in any other area of life. Work to be honest and faithful in the smallest areas of life, and God will look out for you now as well as reward your honesty and integrity with eternal blessings.

Ken Treybig is the national coordinator of United Youth Camps. He is also the pastor of United Church of God congregations in East Texas and western Louisiana.



by Randy Stiver

Throughout the human experience people and tribes have admired various animal abilities—strength, speed, stealth.

In the Bible God actually gave the tribe of Benjamin (one of the 12 tribes of Israel) the symbol of the wolf. “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil” (Genesis 49:27).

Ancient Egyptian mythology included a god called Anubis who was depicted with the body of a man and the head of a jackal—a type of African coyote. Centuries later, the mythology of the Greeks listed Lycaon as a king who displeased their chief god Zeus and was changed into a wolf.

By the Middle Ages numerous regions of Europe held superstitions that some men or women could, through witchcraft, be changed or change at will into wolves with a perverse hunger for human flesh.

Verifying the vampire

Blood-sucking vampire creatures also appeared in various pagan traditions that considered them to be witches. During the late Middle Ages in Serbia and other southern and eastern European areas, vampire superstitions grew stronger—always connected with the occult. Some thought vampires were ghosts, while others still considered them witches. Whatever.

The growth of the Wiccan or witchcraft movement has gained considerable momentum since the late 20th century. With that comes renewed interest in vampires and werewolves—especially among younger generations.

Where does that leave *you*? Have you wondered about such superstitions—especially with the popularity of vampire and witchcraft-based story lines in films and the *Twilight* novel series? Should people—young or old—mentally feed on such entertainments? What’s the harm of play-acting the role of a vampire in computer games or taking on a werewolf avatar?

Is there really some evil power behind werewolfism, vampire mania and witchcraft? And what’s the problem with mentally absorbing through movies, books or games these or other types of witchcraft? They’re just stories, right?

A devilish story

So let me tell you a story—a true story.

In the beginning there was just God. But God is

WHERE Vampires & Werewolves DON'T EXIST!

Witchcraft in all its forms is part of the devil's marketing efforts.

Photo: iStockphoto

Have you ever wondered about the origin of vampire and werewolf superstitions? What's behind them, and what does it mean for us today?

good, the epitome of love—outgoing concern for others. In fact, God desired to share life with others. First God made immortal beings called angels.

We can't see angels unless supernaturally revealed to us because they're spirit and we're physical. But rest assured, they do exist.

God made the angels with intelligence. He wanted them to be good and loving like He is. But good is a choice. So God created them with free will. That means they each had to personally choose good and reject its opposite—evil.

First, the good news: Perhaps two thirds chose goodness. The bad news: Led by the original evil rebel, one third of the angels chose evil (see Revelation 12:4). They refused to follow God and His way of good. This angry, hate-filled third remained immortal angels—fallen angels, better known as demons.

Evil names

We know their leader's name, or names. According to Isaiah 14, God originally dubbed him Helel, a name rendered in Latin as Lucifer—the light bringer, signifying the morning star. His name was one of honor and beauty. But when this great archangel sinned by choosing the way of evil and led the angelic revolt against God, he became known as Satan, meaning adversary. There's no honor in that name.

He has another despicable name too: Devil, which means slanderer, malicious accuser or false witness—someone who spreads lies and rumors about others.

Jesus Christ knows this story and the devil himself all too well: "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44).

Mankind deceived

Continuing the story, God eventually made mankind starting with Adam and Eve. The devil in the form of a talking serpent deceived Eve, who then tempted

Adam. Satan incited them to reject God's leadership and adopt his own self-absorbed, angry, vicious, evil ways. Their decision set in motion the world as we know it today.

But this truly evil being was not content to simply lead humanity down a general path of misery. He and his wicked cohorts sought to plague weak-minded and spiritually gullible human beings with their terrifying demonic influence and even possession.

When Jesus left His divine position in the third heaven to live a perfect human life to be the sacrifice for human sin, He faced down and vanquished mankind's twisted nemesis. After rejecting the devil's temptations, Christ summarily dismissed him: "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve'" (Matthew 4:10).

Throughout His human ministry, Jesus routinely cast demons out of people whose agonizing mental illnesses were partly or wholly caused by demonic possession. To His apostles through whom He would launch the true Christian Church, Jesus delegated the divine authority and power to *also* cast out demons. The apostles required that authority because demonic spirits have considerable power. That demonic power is the force behind the occult and all the wicked ways of this world.

Forces of darkness

The forces of spiritual darkness are nothing to trifle with! They *do* exist—no matter what so-called scientific modern minds say—and they are *dangerous*.

The Bible describes a spiritual battle of epic proportions: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12, King James Version).

Satan has in many ways masterminded humanity's systems of government, commerce, education and religion—

including the bulk of Christianity. They are riddled with false values and spiritual lawlessness.

Witchcraft in all its forms is part of the devil's marketing efforts. On his shelves beckon tempting products of all descriptions—from his apparently "innocuous" entertainments to his hard-core line of direct witchcraft and black magic. The wild popularity of enticing vampire, werewolf and wizard shows and books plus the rapid growth of the Wiccan movement demonstrate the devil's dark influence over gullible humanity.

What you can do

- Reject involvement in vampire, werewolf and witchcraft fads and instead:
- Read and watch other stuff—where good triumphs over evil.
- Develop a healthy self-respect based on true values.
- Find friends who stand for truth.
- Get to know and love your family more.
- Read about the great fighters against spiritual wickedness in the Bible.
- Get better acquainted with your Creator—think vertically.

Your mind

Our world is speeding toward a devastating crash—soon! There never were any literal werewolves and vampires, but the dark power behind the concepts is growing virulently stronger and angrier.

Satan knows his time is short. The destruction of the devil's demonic domination will happen at the return of Jesus Christ. He *will* put Satan away then.

The vertical thinker's challenge is now. You have to make your mind up today. Will yours be a playground for enticements of the evil one—or will your mind be where vampires and werewolves don't exist?

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.

Got a **Decision** to Make? *Read This First!*

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by major decisions with no clear answers. This seven-step process can help.

by Mike Bennett

Heads or tails? Have you ever agonized over a decision and wound up wishing you could just flip a coin for a quick yes-or-no answer? Or do you catch yourself twiddling your thumbs and hoping no one will notice you're stalling?

Education, career and marriage choices can affect the course of your whole life. Character and spiritual choices can have an even more far-reaching impact.

Here are some commonsense strategies that can help you overcome an overwhelming choice.

1

Seek wisdom.

This includes prayer, study of the subject in the Scriptures and seeking wise counsel during the process.

Those who believe in God and the power of prayer know why this step is first. Sometimes there isn't time to do anything else.

The Bible encourages seeking wise counsel. For spiritual decisions, seek a wise, biblically sound minister. For financial advice, seek someone trained and experienced in the field, and avoid anyone who has a conflict of interest—who has something to sell.

Some decisions don't require as much additional counsel because there are already clear answers in the Bible. If someone is asking you to cosign on a loan, Proverbs 6:1-5 gives a warning. If your sales manager wants you to shade the truth to make more sales, the Bible emphatically tells us not to lie (Exodus 20:16; Revelation 21:8)—though exactly what to say or not say to the sales manager probably requires additional wisdom.

3

What would the ideal outcome look like?

Consider it in the context of your mission, values and goals.

In the real world, it can seem pointless to consider the ideal solution. Reality dictates decision making as the art of the possible. But for important decisions—whom you will marry, where you will go to church, where you will work, where you will live—why not make the time to imagine the best possible outcome? One that meshes with your mission in life, your godly values and your personal goals? (See "Your Mission, Should You Choose to Accept It")—Aim high!

2

Clearly state the problem/opportunity.

Usually this means looking at the problem from all sides, gathering as many relevant facts as possible, then boiling it all down to try to isolate the key issue.

Part of stating the problem is to consider: How important is it? A critical decision deserves a major investment in research and time, while a day-to-day decision, not so much.

What blind spots might you have in clearly seeing the situation? For important decisions, get advice from someone you trust but who may not look at it the same way.

4

Brainstorm for options.

Your research and thought to this point have probably identified several options. But often with difficult decisions it's good to apply your mind and enlist your family, friends and experts in finding a few more. Or in those seemingly impossible scenarios, you may need to create some options where none existed before.

However, studies show we can be stressed out by too many choices, so there's no need to invent extra options just for good measure.

About options: In a crisis we may not have many or may not see many. But a proactive approach to life—planning, setting goals, developing skills—generally gives us more options.

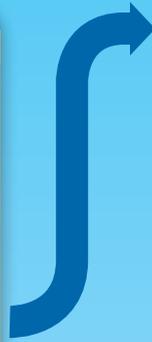
Choosing to develop a variety of useful skills can really increase your chances of success.

7

Do!

Develop a plan of action and a list of deadlines and get started. No matter how much time we spent deciding, we can get cold feet. To be effective, we have to get past this.

However, if it does become clear that we're off course, we can make course corrections. If we've made the wrong decision, we can go through the process again, factoring in the new insights we've learned.



Whatever decisions you face, may they be good and effective ones that will take you along the path God has for you. For more biblical background about our God-given mission in life and how to achieve our goals, read, download or request the free booklets *The Road to Eternal Life*, *What Is Your Destiny?* and *Making Life Work*.

If you have decision-making stories and advice you'd like to share, or if you have questions about biblically related decisions you face, let us know at info@vertical-thought.org.

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6

Decide.

For many of us, this is the hardest part. Not deciding is itself a decision, and generally not the best one.

If two choices appear equally good and your trusted advisers are split, it may require going with your intuition or even a coin toss.

One of the biggest problems with decisions—especially moral choices—is timing. What's the ideal time to make a decision about a potential problem? Before the problem arises.

Such preparation allows you "to identify your potential temptations, weaknesses, vices, 'fatal attractions,' blind spots, cravings, addictions, etc., and you are able to proactively devise a plan of action that you will not, for any reason, deviate from when faced with any temptation, or other attractive alternatives or options" (Ken Lindner, *Crunch Time: Eight Steps to Making the Right Life Decisions at the Right Times*, 1999, p. 166).



5

Wisely weigh the options.

How do you compare your choices? Only 16 percent of Americans base moral choices on the Bible, according to a 2005 survey by the Barna Group. Those who do, however, have an easier time comparing.

Some options are easy to eliminate if they break God's laws or are obviously unlikely to produce the desired outcome. After rejecting these, hopefully some options are still available. (If not, you might have to reexamine those unlikely ones or brainstorm some more.)

Weigh the pros and cons of each option. For a decision about which college to attend, for instance, you might make a table comparing your college options based on such factors as:

- Strength of academic program in your field.
- Faculty/student ratio or class sizes.
- Cost/financial aid packages.
- Distance from home, etc.

Often the complexities and number of factors involved can lead to analysis paralysis. Consulting wise counselors can give you fresh insights or reinforce your feelings at this stage.



Your Mission, Should You Choose to Accept It

If your goal in life is just to make money, it may be fairly easy to measure your progress. But when all is said and done in your life, is money the answer? Not if the question is, What mission does God have for my life?

Jesus Christ said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). The only real hope for humanity, and the true meaning of life, is God's Kingdom. God has a plan to bring you into His Kingdom and family, and He invites you to join Him in His mission of bringing many sons and daughters to glory (Hebrews 2:10; 2 Corinthians 6:18).

Having God's mission and a real purpose for your life can make all the difference in difficult times. Viktor Frankl, who survived the Nazi Holocaust, spent his life studying *Man's Search for Meaning* (as one of his books is called). He concluded, quoting Nietzsche, "He who has a *why* to live can bear with almost any *how*."

Catching God's vision gives us a launching pad for making right decisions—decisions that are meaningful and ultimately satisfying. Read more about this in our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*

Know No Doubt

How do we dispel doubts in our personal lives? The example of a former king is insightful.



by Barry Korthuis

We've all had doubts—about ourselves, others, the future, maybe even God. We all face obstacles that seem impossible to overcome.

What about the familiar biblical story of David and Goliath? Did doubt play a part in it too?

The scene is set in 1 Samuel 17 with the Philistines on one hill and the Israelite army commanded by King Saul on the other, only a valley separating them. Tensions were high as the Israelites faced a giant problem.

The Philistines had sent out their champion, Goliath of Gath, to challenge the Israelites. The Israelites were expected to send out their own champion, who would fight Goliath to the death. Goliath bellowed out that the people of the losing side would become the servants of the winning side. Israel had a lot to lose.

Finding someone to face Goliath wasn't easy. The man was huge, standing "six cubits and a span" (1 Samuel 17:4), which was more than 9 feet tall. He might well have weighed around 700 pounds. Given the descriptions of

his armor, Goliath was also strong. His armor probably weighed between 125 and 150 pounds, and his spear between 35 and 65 pounds.

Adding to his impressive size and strength, Goliath must have been fierce. He had trained in fighting since his youth, becoming a virtual human war machine. And he was determined to take the life of anyone who dared to challenge him.

For 40 days, the giant taunted Israel every morning and evening. His words struck great fear in the hearts of Saul and his army. So why didn't Saul or one of his soldiers engage Goliath? After all, Saul was also a tall man (1 Samuel 10:23) with battle experience. More importantly, the Bible tells us God was with Saul when Israel defeated the invading Ammonites and he was proclaimed king (1 Samuel 11).

Saul's reluctance to engage Goliath was due, at least in part, to his disobedience that separated him from God. Against God's instruction, Saul spared King Agag of the Amalekites and kept the spoils of war. As a result, the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and God allowed a distressing spirit to replace it (1 Samuel 16:14). When God is pushed out of a person's mind, doubt enters. Doubts that are allowed to settle in can quickly build into debilitating fear.

Without doubt or hesitation David killed Goliath with the first stone from the sling, sending the Philistine army running. He gave full credit to God and recognized the battle was the Lord's.

Enter the small guy

Not knowing of the stalemate between Goliath and the Israelite army, young David was sent by his father to bring food to his older brothers and to return with any news. While there, he heard Goliath's daily challenge firsthand and saw that the fearful men of Israel had lost their faith in God.

David ignored the doubters around him and boldly volunteered to fight the giant. When questioned by Saul, David explained that he had complete trust in God and confidence that God would give him the victory.

True armor

The key to David's confidence was using the proper armor. Instead of using Saul's armor, David chose a sling and a handful of stones, knowing this was all he needed.

When David was earlier anointed the future king of Israel, God's Spirit came upon him (1 Samuel 16:13). He had also experienced God's help when he killed both a lion and a bear to protect his sheep. David was confident that God would likewise help him fight Goliath.

David's confidence was in *God's* protection and not in his own ability. Ephesians 6 describes the armor of God, and verse 10 specifically tells us to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

When the fateful moment arrived, David ran quickly toward Goliath. Without doubt or hesitation he killed Goliath with the first stone from the sling, sending the Philistine army running. He gave full credit to God and recognized the battle was the Lord's.

Analyzing the victory

God's Spirit made the difference between Saul's doubts and David's confidence. After Saul rejected God's word and disobeyed Him, God no longer guided his actions. Without God's Spirit helping him, he couldn't get past the situation from a human perspective. And neither can we.

God's Spirit is not "a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). And God is willing to give His Spirit to all who truly repent and are baptized (Acts 2:38). Let's also realize that God's Spirit can work *with* us prior to baptism; it is just that after we are baptized His Spirit resides *within* us. So we're never too young to begin obeying God and allowing His Spirit to inspire us and help us live His way of life.

Living in doubt is painful. Doubts lead to anxiety, paranoia, restlessness and the wrong kind of fear.

Facing your giants

God's miraculous help for His people did not end when David overcame Goliath. God is willing to help you overcome your problems too.

We all face a very real adversary, Satan the devil, who uses doubt as a tool to sabotage our relationship with God. Satan wants us to be uncertain. He wants us to disbelieve God—to lose confidence in Him. Satan wants us to hold on to our doubts and live in a paralyzing state of fear. But God has something else in mind for us: setting aside our doubts and challenging our giants.

David isn't the only one who prevailed over huge obstacles. The Bible is filled with stories of deliverance of those who trusted in God's ways and living power. By seeking God's help, we can also overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. When we obey God and put our confidence in Him, there will be no place for doubt.

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Answers for Gent

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Who were the “sons of God” mentioned in Genesis 6:1-4?

Scholars debate and disagree over the meaning of the reference to “the sons of God” in Genesis 6:1-

4. Some people read into these verses the idea that it refers to angelic beings marrying women and producing a race of giants. Christ explained that is impossible, teaching that angels don’t marry and, by implication, don’t produce children either (Luke 20:34-36).

Human beings are clearly the subject in Genesis 6—not angels. God said, “My Spirit shall not strive with *man* forever, for he is indeed *flesh*” (verse 3) and, “I will destroy *man* whom I have created from the face of the earth” (verse 7, emphasis added throughout).

The “giants” in verse 4 were simply people of giant stature. Similar people are spoken of in later times, most notably Goliath and his family.

Regardless of which explanation is accurate, the idea that a half-spirit, half-human race resulted from angels marrying women is not what the Bible teaches.

How, then, can we understand Genesis 6:1-4? Human beings are also sons of God. This is not referring to becoming spiritual sons of God through conversion, but to the fact that all people are sons of God by creation (Luke 3:38). The attitudes and actions of these “sons of God” were so wrong that they provoked God to send the Flood.

Halley’s Bible Handbook raises the possibility that these sons of God were the descendants of Adam and Eve’s son Seth. Seth, the Bible records, was a son in the image of Adam, who was made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26; 5:1-3).

Speaking of Seth’s descendants, Genesis 4:26 adds, “men began to call on the name of the LORD,” a phrase that could also be rendered, “to be called *after* the name of the LORD”—that is, the “sons of God.” If so, the women, “the daughters of men” whom these “sons of God” married, were the descendants of unrighteous Cain. By marrying these women, the sons of Seth

turned from God, leading Him to say that the entire world was then corrupt (Genesis 6:5-7, 12).

An alternative explanation is that “sons of God” in Genesis 6:2 should be rendered “sons of the gods” and refers to men who were called such not in worship of the Creator, but of pagan deities. Their marriages would have been in defiance of the Creator God, as they lived contrary to His will. Indeed, in light of God’s characterization of society riddled with violence (verses 11, 13), it could be that such men forcibly took the women as wives.

Regardless of which explanation is accurate, the idea that a half-spirit, half-human race resulted from angels marrying women is not what the Bible teaches.

Was Noah’s Flood a local or a worldwide event?

Genesis 7:19-23 states: “And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and *all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered.*

The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the *mountains were covered.* And all flesh died that moved on the earth... So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man

and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive.”

Jesus Christ confirmed that the Flood was global in scope. He said, “For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and *took them all away*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:38-39).

In addition, the apostle Peter taught about a universal flood, saying, “For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which *the world that then existed perished*, being flooded with water” (2 Peter 3:5-6). Clearly, he was referring to a *worldwide flood*.

Moreover, the Bible clearly records that the ark finally settled upon the mountains of Ararat. Could a local flood

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Part 5

The book of Genesis is known as the book of origins. Here are more frequently asked questions about it.

by Mario Seiglie

have lifted Noah's ark to the top of those mountains?

As Gleason Archer, professor of Old Testament studies, explained: "Now the most elementary knowledge of physical law leads to the observation that water seeks its own level... If the water level rose thirty thousand feet so as to submerge the peak of Mount Everest, the world's tallest mountain, it must have reached that level everywhere else on earth... Therefore we must conclude that *the Flood was indeed universal*, or else that the biblical record was grievously in error" (*Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, 1982, p. 82).

It may be that mountains were not then as tall as Everest, but even if they were much small, the water rising above the tallest one means the whole world would still have been covered in water.

According to the Bible, the whole Flood event lasted less than a year, and it took just a few months to reach its peak and then quickly recede again.

Professor Archer comments on what he sees as confirmation of the Flood from paleontology: "Perhaps the most striking evidences of the violence of the Deluge throughout the earth are to be found in the amazing profusion of Pleistocene animals whose bones have been discovered in a violently separated state in several ossiferous [bone-laden] fissures that have been excavated in various locations in Europe and North America..."

"Since no skeleton is complete, it is safe to conclude that none of these animals (mammoths, bears, wolves, oxen, hyenas, rhinoceros, deer, and many smaller mammals) fell into these fissures alive, nor were they rolled there by streams. Yet because of the calcite cementing of these heterogeneous bones together, they must necessarily have been deposited *under water*..."

"This is just exactly the kind of evidence that a *brief but violent episode* of this sort would be expected to show within the short span of one year" (ibid., pp. 82-83).

Other possible evidence of a universal flood comes from studies of the ocean floor. In the 1960s and 70s, two American oceanographic vessels took long, slender core samples from the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico. They contained sediments of shells from plankton called foraminifera. While alive, they leave traces in their

shells of the chemical composition of the water that indicate temperature and salinity. When they reproduce, the shells are discarded and fall to the bottom. A cross-section of that sea bottom carries a record of climates that are attested to go back more than 100 million years according to traditional dating methods. Every inch of core may represent as much as 1,000 years of the earth's past.

What scientists found left them astounded. Several thousand years ago, the foraminifera shells registered a sudden plunge in the salinity of the water. Dr. Cesare Emiliani, the founder of paleoceanography, notes: "The North American ice cap underwent a sudden collapse, followed by rapid melting. A huge amount of ice-melt water rushed into the Gulf of Mexico and produced a sea-level rise that spread around the world with the

"Therefore we must conclude that the Flood was indeed universal, or else that the biblical record was grievously in error."

speed of a great tidal wave...

"We know this, because the oxygen isotope ratio of the foraminifera shells show a marked temporary *decrease* in the *salinity* of the waters of the Gulf of Mexico... *There is no question that there was a flood*, and there is *no question that it was a universal flood*" (Fred Warshofsky, "Noah, the Flood, the Facts," *Reader's Digest*, September 1977, p. 133).

Historian Werner Keller relates: "Among people of all races there is a variety of traditions of a gigantic and catastrophic Flood. The Greeks told the Flood story...; long before Columbus many stories told among the natives of the continent of America kept the memory of a great Flood alive; in Australia, India, Polynesia, Tibet, Kashmir and Lithuania tales of a Flood have been handed down from generation to generation to the present day... It is highly probable that they all reflect the same world wide catastrophe" (*The Bible as History*, 1981, p. 43). Does this sound like the Flood was local? Absolutely not!

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

United Youth Camps in French-Speaking Africa

Having previously served on the staff of United Youth Camps in the United States, my husband Daniel and I wondered what camp would be like in Togo and Cameroon.

by Cindy Harper

This past summer my husband Daniel and I had the incredible opportunity of helping with two short summer camps in French-speaking Africa. We had longed dreamed of participating in international service projects, and a job transfer to France finally made this opportunity possible.

Our original plan was to volunteer for the United Youth Corps project in Ghana, where English is spoken, but it turned out that we were needed more in Togo and Cameroon, helping to organize and host the first-ever youth camps in these French-speaking regions of Africa.

Our experience with the youth summer camps in francophone Africa was understandably very different from our camps in the United States. For the African camps, we brought some sports equipment

with us, but much of what we did was on a creative budget. We strung together our own volleyball net from rope and boards, and we had to search to find a large open field or dirt area to play ultimate Frisbee. We even shared a soccer field with local children.

Amazingly, the kitchen staff cooked outstanding meals in a courtyard on open fires (no ovens, stoves or running water). What we immediately noticed was that even though the facilities were different, the positive spirit of camp was the same.

Illustrating this point, our Q&A Bible study in Togo was cut short one night when the power went out. In spite of such forced schedule changes, the youth all bonded together and learned to do things they had never done before. Ultimate Frisbee was a brand-new concept for everyone and a huge

hit. We attracted spectators from all around! Some of the campers had never touched a volleyball before and yet listened so well to the instructions that they picked it up very quickly.

It was amazing to introduce team-building exercises and watch the same things happen, as campers learned from their mistakes and figured out how to communicate better and work together. It brought home the fact that as human beings, no matter the background, culture or language we speak, we are similar in our actions and strategies. In spite of the differences, the heart is the same.

The first volleyball class

One of our most memorable days was when we taught volleyball for the first time in Cameroon. We had to walk a long way on a dirt road through a bit of jungle to find a flat,

open spot of ground, large enough to set up a makeshift net and draw some lines. Some local children watched from a distance, as we taught the basics of how to bump and set a volleyball.

At first the local spectators laughed and made fun of our efforts. (In the national sport of



Togo: Team-building challenge.



Cameroon: Learning Frisbee basics.

soccer you don't touch the ball with your hands.) But after a while they began to see how much fun it was. And near the end of our volleyball time, we looked over and those who'd been watching were now in a circle, bumping and setting a soccer ball around just as we had done in our practice! Our campers really let their light shine as they worked together, encouraged one another and had fun learning new things.

One of the topics in journalism class was, "What would you most like to change about the present world?" I was interested to read some of the things they would change, including putting an end to civil wars, corruption, killings, drought and famine, ignorance of the Word of God, and sickness.

These are real problems and threats to the youth in Africa. Reflecting on this helps me to remember to pray for people there and to pray more fervently for the Kingdom of God.

At the end of camp, attendees expressed the same sentiments we hear in the United States: Why can't camp be longer? Can we do this again next year?

The results were also the same. Old friendships were strengthened and new friendships forged. The youth in the United Church of God had learned more about God, His Word and His way of life. They were strengthened by one another's examples.

The blessing of serving

It was a wonderful blessing for Daniel and me to play a small part in bringing something as wonderful as camp to the youth in Togo and Cameroon and to watch the familiar positive effects unfold before our eyes, but in a very different environment and language.

I found this camp experience to

be an opportunity to "give back" and to use what I have learned as a camper and worker at UCG camps in the United States. Countless directors, staff, volunteers and organizers work hard every year to put on wonderful camps all over the United States. How do you repay these people for all the time, energy and care they have invested in you? There's no price tag you can put on something so valuable. But one thing you *can* do is give it back—to other people!

God's Word tells us in Ecclesiastes 9:10 that "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might." As a camper and later as a worker at summer camps, I had a lot of fun participating in and directing sports activities. I saw the immediate value in what I was doing and in the camp experience as a whole, but I didn't think that I would really use what I learned in volleyball, Frisbee or team building.

In hindsight I now understand that these experiences I enjoyed and learned from at that time also gave me skills and knowledge that I can use to help others. Serving at camps in Africa simply allowed me to pass on the gifts that had earlier been given to me.

Sometimes you don't know if or when you will use certain skills or knowledge you gain at home, camp or school. But if you learn well and work hard, God can find a way to work through you. He can give you opportunities to use what you've learned through your experiences to help others. So whenever you have a chance to learn and grow, put your heart into it, do it with all your might and see what God will do through you!

Cindy Harper lives near Cherbourg, France, with her husband Daniel. The Harpers plan to live in France for four years before returning to the United States.



Togo: Group of campers and workers at the soccer field.



Cameroon: Group of local children imitating our volleyball instruction.



Cameroon: Group of campers and workers at the camp in Douala.



Togo: Group of campers and workers at the camp in Lome.

A friend is supposed to be there for you through good times and bad. What can you do to restore a friendship?

What can you do when your friend blabs your secret all over school, ditches you at lunch when the cool crowd asks him to sit with them, doesn't follow through on a promise, excludes you from her social plans, badmouths you behind your back, teases you about something you're really sensitive about or forgets plans she made with you or cancels at the last minute?

When these kinds of things happen, you can feel hurt, confused, upset and really sad. This friend who has always meant a lot to you has now let you down in a big way. You want to keep the friendship going, but you don't like how you were treated either. So how should you respond?

Here are some suggestions, based on the Bible as well as the advice of professional counselors:

Talk things out

The number-one thing you should do is talk to your friend about what's bothering you. This is what we're told to do in Matthew 18:15: "Moreover if your brother [or sister or friend] sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone."

Don't just go up to your friend when you see her in the hallway at school and start unloading on her. She may be rushing off to class, and other students may be within earshot. Talk somewhere that's private, not in public where either of you may feel self-conscious.

Start by telling your friend that you really value your friendship and that you care about her, which is why you wanted to meet with her. Then you can get into what she did that upset you.

Talk from your own point of view by making "I" statements: "I don't think you realize how your joke came across," or "I felt terrible when you canceled plans." Avoid making "You" statements, which sound accusatory, and harsh generalizations like "You never think about anyone but yourself!"

Give your friend the opportunity to respond, and listen carefully to what he says. See if he has any ideas for how to

When A Friend Lets You Down

by Becky Sweet

It might not be easy, but you and your friend can get through it. True friends don't give up on each other when they see a few faults. *They work it out.*

repair any damage that's been done and how to prevent this kind of situation from happening again. That shows him you value his opinions and point of view.

Don't let the discussion become heated. If you say things in anger, you're bound to say something you'll regret later.

Comments like, "I'm sorry I ever became friends with you!" will stick in your friend's mind and may permanently scar the friendship. If necessary, suggest to your friend that you talk this out at a later time when both of you are calm.

Keep an open mind

Go into your talk with an open mind. Don't judge your friend harshly and assume you know why he did what he did or what *really* happened, before you've even talked with him.

Ask your friend what she thinks happened. Perhaps one or both of you has your facts wrong. Wesley, 16, was mad at his friend for keeping him waiting an hour at the library, where they were going to meet to study together. "Later, when we compared notes, we discovered that each of us got the time wrong about when we were supposed to meet," he related.

Give your friend room to explain his actions. "We all have different reasons for doing the things we do," notes Clifton Saper, Ph.D., a family psychologist in Evanston, Illinois. Sometimes what seems to be a major character flaw is simply a reflection of a different personality, upbringing, cultural background or lifestyle.

For example, it may appear as though your friend doesn't care about the friendship as much as you because she doesn't invite you over to her house or call you as often as you call her. In reality, that could be because she is not as extroverted as

you. Or she may have a tougher class load and a lot more homework than you and not have as much free time.

Involve a third party if necessary

If, after trying to talk with your friend, you aren't able to find a solution or you both insist the other was "totally wrong," this is the time to bring in outside help. Find a third party—someone neutral, discreet and mature—who can listen to you both and help you work out your disagreement.

This person could be your pastor, school counselor, teacher or another trusted adult. Sometimes an outside mediator can see a solution to the problem that you both are overlooking.

Don't broadcast your friend's shortcomings

One of the biggest mistakes you can make when you're upset with somebody is to talk to everyone you know about the situation *except* the person who offended you. Don't do this.

"It's one thing if you choose one other valued friend who will listen in confidence while you pour out your feelings of hurt. But if you start telling lots of other people, that is gossip," says adolescent psychologist Jerry Weichman, Ph.D., of Newport Beach, California.

Proverbs 17:9 tells us, "He who repeats a matter separates friends." Even if what you are saying is true, if it is hurtful and destructive it is still wrong to go around repeating it.

Almost invariably, your "chatter" will get back to the person you're talking about, and she will be hurt that you didn't go to her about the problem.

This may be a harder obstacle for your friendship to get past than the original misunderstanding that upset you.

Forgive and forget

After bringing these issues to your friend's attention, chances are he (or she) will be relieved you took the first step towards peace, and will apologize for what he did. If you reacted angrily or hastily, be willing to say you're sorry too.

Once you've made amends, put it all behind you. Don't dwell on what happened or on your friend's shortcomings.

Of course, there's the chance your friend may make the same blunder again in the future. If it's something that's just annoying—he's often late, can't keep secrets, talks more than listens—those might be the kinds of things you can learn to live with. Colossians 3:13 declares: "You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others" (New Living Translation).

That was the case with Molly, age 17. She explains: "My friend Miranda can't keep a secret, but she's a good friend in every other way. I got tired of her telling other people my personal business, but I didn't want to lose her friendship. I just had to learn to not confide in her anymore."

If your friend's offenses are something you can't tolerate (e.g., her teasing has gotten vicious or more frequent) and she isn't interested in changing or patching things up, reconciliation may not be an option. In most cases, though, the difficulties can be resolved.

It might not be easy, but you and your friend can get through it. True friends don't give up on each other when they see a few faults. They work it out.

Becky Sweat is a freelance writer specializing in health and family topics. She lives in the Dallas, Texas, area with her husband and two sons.

The Story of the Stars & Matter

Scientific studies of the heavens and the world around us reveal fascinating details about the earth's history and destiny.

by David Treybig

The first time I ever seriously considered the stars was when a group of youth and parents from our church decided to go to the local planetarium to see some of the best photos of the stars ever taken. Leaning back in my chair in the darkened room in order to better view the reproduction that shone against the domed ceiling, I was awed by the magnitude and beauty of the universe.

At the end of the program, the announcer said what we had just seen was proof that we human beings as well as the heavens were simply part of an ongoing evolutionary process.

“How could he say that?” I wondered to myself. Even though the universe is expanding, that doesn't prove that people came about by blind chance. I knew that Jesus had created all things “that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible” (Colossians 1:16) and that the heavens declared the glory of God (Psalm 19:1; 97:6)—not mindless evolution.

So I found it puzzling that people could view our magnificent universe and think that it all came about by mere chance—that we and all we can observe are simply a cosmic accident.

In pondering this experience, I came to realize that one's view is greatly influenced by whether one believes in God and, subsequently, by one's ability to recognize the evidence of God's involvement in everything that we see.

Since the vast majority of our readers already know that God exists (see our article “Let Me Introduce You to God” in the January-March 2009 issue), in this article we'll consider the biblical story of the stars and why this knowledge is so important.

What the heavens are telling

The Bible explains that “since the creation of the world god's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made” (Romans 1:20, New International Version). So what can we learn from what we see?

In fashioning the earth for mankind, God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth” (Genesis 1:14-15).

From the beginning of human history, people have easily confirmed these basic purposes for the sun and moon. But after Adam and Eve (and later their descendants) rejected God as the source of education, human beings soon came up with the mistaken idea that the heavenly bodies—instead of God and how we respond to our Creator—determine our destiny.

Many ancient peoples made the mistake of worshipping the sun, moon and stars (Deuteronomy 17:3; 2 Kings 17:16) and living by astrology (Jeremiah 8:2; 10:2). Of course, the problem wasn't mankind's fascination with the heavens. The problem was that by rejecting God, they lost the ability to properly understand what they were seeing.

Today astronomers and cosmologists—those who study objects and matter outside the earth's atmosphere and those who study the nature of the universe—tell us that the evidence around us reveals the beginning of our universe, how the planets and stars

may have developed, and the eventual end of our universe.

Extrapolating from careful observation points to the eventual end of our planet and life as we know it. The continual expansion of the universe and the laws of physics tell us that our universe is headed toward heat death—a time when everything would be at the same temperature, near absolute zero, and energy transference would cease.

Designed for discovery

Scientists are also discovering that our world is stamped with signs of intelligence behind its formation and that markers were apparently left behind inviting us to discover what transpired.

Dr. Stephen Meyer, a multi-credentialed academic and one of the leading voices in the intelligent design movement, put this in perspective, stating that “across a wide range of sciences, evidence has come to light in the last fifty years which, taken together, provides a robust case for theism [belief in an intervening God]. Only theism can provide an intellectually satisfying causal explanation for all of this evidence” (quoted by Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator*, 2004, p. 89).

Asked to identify and explain some of this evidence, Dr. Meyer responded: “For instance, if it's true there's a beginning to the universe, as modern cosmologists now agree, then this implies a cause that transcends the universe. If the laws of physics are fine-tuned to permit life, as contemporary physicists are discovering, then perhaps there's a designer who fine-tuned them.

“If there's information in the cell,



Barred Spiral Galaxy NGC 1300

as molecular biology shows, then this suggests intelligent design. To get life going in the first place would have required biological information; the implications point beyond the material realm to a prior intelligent cause. Those are just three examples. And that’s just the beginning” (ibid., pp. 89-90).

Benefits of the biblical explanation

Having considered some of the evidence for a Creator, let’s make a few comparisons between Darwinism—the theory advocated by Charles Darwin that man evolved by chance—and the Bible.

The existence of the stars and the ongoing expansion of the universe indicates that there was indeed a beginning to all that we see. In contrast to Darwinism, which has no explanation for how matter came into

existence, the Bible explains that God Himself created the heavens and earth. Isaiah 45 quotes God as saying, “I have made the earth, and created man on it. I—My hands—stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded” (verse 12).

Darwinism offers no purpose for mankind. It teaches that human beings are just a lucky accident. In contrast to this meaninglessness, the Bible explains that God created people for the purpose of becoming part of His family (John 1:12).

With Darwinism, there is no hope for the future; this life is all there is. With God, people have the opportunity to live forever (1 John 2:17). And the Bible even reveals that God already has plans for “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1), where those who become part of His family will reside with Him after planet earth

undergoes a fiery transformation (2 Peter 3:7).

The biblical story of the stars and the purpose for man makes far more sense than mindless evolution. Furthermore, this story offers the best life now and the opportunity to be part of a future world.

If you go to a planetarium and hear the same pro evolutionary conclusion I did, now you’ll have had a chance to think it through in advance and understand the real story. To further prove God’s existence and to understand more about the purpose for your life, request or read online our free booklets *Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *What Is Your Destiny?*

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God Knows the Names of *How Many Stars?*

Psalm 147:4 tells us that God “counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name.” Trying to understand the magnitude of God’s ability through these acts is difficult for us to comprehend because, until recently, no one knew how many stars existed.

In the last few months of 2003 and part of January 2004, however, astronomers got their best look to date at the heavens. From that look, they came to a reasonable estimate of the number of stars. In a

million-second (278-hour) exposure of a specified percentage of the starry sky called the Hubble Ultra Deep Field, astronomers counted slightly more than 10,000 galaxies (hubblesite.org).

Multiplying this result by the whole area of the sky, there are approximately 200 billion galaxies in the universe. According to astronomer Hugh Ross in his book *Why the Universe Is the Way It Is*: “These 200 billion galaxies contain, on average, about 200 billion stars each. So

the total number of stars in these galaxies adds up to about 40 billion trillion—and that’s without the estimated 10 billion trillion stars contained in the unobserved dwarf galaxies. Somewhere around 50 billion trillion stars make their home in the observable universe” (2008, p. 31).

No wonder the psalmist followed his comment about God counting the stars and calling them all by name with, “Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite” (verse 5).



E-readers: Ink of the Future

Like something out of *Star Trek*, a newspaper editor reaches across his desk for a slim, page-sized rectangular sheet of plastic, pushes a button, touches the screen and the daily headlines appear. He tosses the e-reader from one hand lightly to the other, lets it drop to the desk and turns to his computer to reprimand an employee for a typo...

Elsewhere, a student picks up his e-reader and taps the screen until the correct page of his textbook appears, reads a sentence or two, and then continues writing his essay assignment for the day...

Okay, back to reality. But is this all that far-fetched? Kindle, an electronic reader specifically designed to be easy on the eyes and user-friendly, is currently available from Amazon.com. Sony has a similar design, and many technology companies will follow suit with similar readers for books, magazines and newspapers during the course of the year (Michael Copeland, "The End of Paper?" *Fortune*, March 3, 2009). A new technology and a new era of the "printed" word... Stay tuned for its impact on life as we know it!

>In the News<

Compiled by Amanda Stiver

Faith Helps Fight for Life

Those with strong religious beliefs, a recent study finds, are more likely to seek aggressive life-prolonging care when faced with a potentially terminal illness like cancer.

The Coping With Cancer study, funded by the National Cancer Institute and the National Institute of Mental Health, also found that nearly 80 percent of those enduring advanced stages of cancer felt they were better able to cope because of their primarily Christian, religious faith (Madison Park, "Religious Patients Are More Likely to Get Intensive Life-Prolonging Care," CNN.com, March 18, 2009).

Proverbs 17:22 states, "A merry heart does good, like medicine," and nothing is more positive than knowing of and having faith in the long-term positive future that God has planned for His creation.



Teen Traits and Abstinence

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health found that young people who abstain from sex before marriage share eight specific character traits (Jennifer Mesko, "Eight Traits Characterize Teens Who Abstain From Sex," Citizenlink.org, Jan. 13, 2009):

- ★ Being willing to postpone momentary pleasures for long-term goals.
- ★ Ability to stick to a task or a commitment.
- ★ Belief that current behavior can impact the future.

- ★ Future focus.
- ★ Control of impulses.
- ★ Resistance to peer influence.
- ★ Respect for parental values.
- ★ Sense of personal dignity.

These traits are similar to various biblical principles, including characteristics constituting the fruit of God's Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). God's way of life really works!

Internet Dictionary to Shake Bookshelves

Erin McKean, a professional lexicographer (word researcher), is launching a Web site called Wordnik.com which is intended to revolutionize the dictionary world. The member site will include larger numbers of new words, increased word-use examples and will allow user interaction.

The endless space of the Internet provides room to address the rapidly growing slang of the English language, audio features that allow users to hear words pronounced correctly and pictures when applicable (Jina Moore, "New Online Dictionary Redefines 'Look It Up,'" *Christian Science Monitor*, March 16, 2009).



15%

of Americans claimed no religion in 2008—up from 8.2% in 1990.

—Rachel Zoll, "More Americans Claim No Religion," Associated Press, March 9, 2009

Photos: Shaun Vneish, iStockphoto

Trend Toward Online Education

With economic uncertainty around the world, many workers are turning to online higher education courses to help them retain their current jobs or improve their résumés as they look for new jobs.

As economies slow and jobs are cut, colleges and universities are seeing an increase in both traditional and online degree programs, according to a study by the Sloan Consortium. Experts recommend a bachelor's degree for those who are without one as a necessity when applying for any job. For those who already have an undergraduate degree, they recommend volunteering at a corporation as a means of résumé building (A. Pawlowski, "Riding Out the Recession in a Virtual Classroom," CNN.com, March 18, 2009).

Superheroes: Signs of the Times

Toward the end of the Great Depression in the 1930s, comic book superheroes Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman and Captain America made their debut. They grew in popularity; and today, during an era that is beginning to mirror the hardship of the '30s, they continue to win big with movie audiences (Douglas Hyde, "Superheroes Rise in Tough Times," CNN.com, March 20, 2009).

When times get tough, everybody wants a hero. However, it's important to rely on a hero who can *actually* save people. The name *Jesus* means "Savior" and there's a reason. He will save the entire planet one day soon.



No More Scratches?

Even though shellfish are unclean and not fit to eat (Leviticus 11:10), they are useful in developing scratchproof coatings. A new mixture using molecules made from chitosan, derived from the shells of crabs and other crustaceans, self-heals with exposure to ultraviolet sunlight after being scratched. The process takes about 30 minutes, a significant improvement over previous self-healing substances ("Coatings That 'Self-Heal' in Sun," News.BBC.co.uk, March 12, 2009).



Wait! There's More ...

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VerticalThought.org

The cyanobacteria clock [a biological clock found in blue-green algae] consists of just three proteins. One of them ... looks surprisingly like a cog, or escape wheel, in a mechanical watch," according to biologist Susan Golden at Texas A&M.

—Robert Boyd, "Scientists Unraveling Mysteries of Biological Clocks," McClatchy Newspapers, Feb. 17, 2009

Brain wave patterns spike just before subjects make mistakes on a specially designed visual test, according to a recent study by U.S. and Dutch researchers.

—"Brain Waves 'Foreshadow Mistakes,'" BBC News, March 24, 2009

Obesity Limits Length of Life

British researchers at the University of Oxford analyzed the findings of 57 studies, following almost 1 million people for 15 years, including 100,000 who died during that time. Their studies revealed that those with a body mass index (BMI) of 30 to 35 lowered their life expect-

tancy by three years. Those with a BMI of 40 and above cut 10 years from their lifespan ("Study: Obesity Shaves Years Off Life," Associated Press, March 18, 2009).

The results of this study aren't groundbreaking, but they are an impressive reminder of the importance of living a fit and healthy lifestyle and staying in a moderate weight range for longer life.



**“I got to thank ...
The devil for the trouble that I get into.
I got to give credit where credit is due.”**

(from “Thank God for You,” a country and western song recorded by Sawyer Brown)



Wait a minute! How much trouble do I get into? And how much credit for it is due the devil?

Hmm ... but what if there isn't a devil? No, that can't be because then the blame for my troubles would be all mine. I need to find out for sure ...

Good news, you can find out for sure if there really is a devil. You can understand who shares the credit—or blame—for the troubles in your life and in our world today. In fact, you can learn how to discredit the devil.

But now, take a little credit for vertical thinking and request or download your free copy of this revealing booklet *Is There Really a Devil?*

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