

The Good News

July-August 2013

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING

You Can Have a *Happy Marriage*



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BEYOND
TODAY
UNDERSTANDING YOUR FUTURE

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Marriage: What's the Point?

As a minister, two ceremonies in particular have always brought me great pleasure—baptisms and weddings. I've done some of both, and I find them profoundly moving because of what each represents.

At its core, baptism represents surrender of the self and complete commitment to God. Interestingly enough, the wedding ceremony similarly represents surrender and commitment—surrender of the self in giving one's life to another and the commitment to sharing everything that one has with his or her partner for life. Both are formal commitments and binding agreements.

Both are also ceremonies revolving around love. Baptism reflects God's love for us in extending His mercy and forgiveness toward us, washing away our sins by the sacrifice of His Son who gave His life for us, and it reflects our love back in giving our lives to Him in

Why is marriage so important? Unlike other relationships, it is one that God Himself created when He joined together the first human beings, Adam and Eve.

return. A wedding similarly reflects the commitment of two people who have chosen to commit their lives to one another in love.

These are a few of the thoughts that I've pondered as I've considered the meaning of the apostle Paul's words in Ephesians 5 where, after describing the roles of husbands and wives in marriage, he says, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (verse 32).

Yes, there's certainly much more to marriage than just saying "I do." Paul tells us that the marriage relationship is to teach us about Jesus Christ's love for His people, the Church, and their devotion to Him. It's a beautiful picture telling us that love is definitely a two-way street.

Why is marriage so important? Unlike other relationships, it's one that God Himself created when He joined together the first human beings, Adam and Eve. As Jesus Himself explained: "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:4-6).

Marriage does involve two people becoming one—again, a beautiful picture of the loving commitment a couple makes in joining together in marriage.

God is love (1 John 4:8, 16)—which summarizes His nature, character and motivations in everything He does. And to help us grow spiritually to become like Him in every way, He has given us the institution—the learning experience and classroom—of marriage. Through marriage we are to experience, learn and make a part of our very being, nature and character the deep love that sums up the nature of the Father and Jesus Christ His Son.

Learning this kind of outgoing love toward another person doesn't come naturally. But again, God gives us another wonderful tool—His Word. In it He has a great deal to say about marriage and about how to learn what it means to truly love others. God wants us all to enjoy a happy, rewarding and fulfilling marriage, and we at *The Good News* want to help. When you put into practice the tips and advice in this issue, you'll be on your way toward experiencing that blessing in your life!

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor



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5 KEYS TO A Happy Marriage



The institution of marriage has never been more under attack. About half of all newly married couples end up in divorce. Are there keys that can open the door to a happy or happier marriage? *by Jerold Aust*

Not long after Bill and Maria first met, they found themselves hopelessly in love. Neither was thinking of marriage or its responsibilities. They realized the importance of an education and a steady job and that marriage would change their lives completely.

Soon they found themselves at the altar before the minister, with a room full of family and friends looking on with anticipation. The setting was surreal as the words of the wedding ceremony floated through the air.

What they did know, *or thought they knew*, was that they were going to spend the rest of their lives together in an ocean of bliss. At that point, they luxuriated in the heady feelings that they assumed would fuel their marriage forever.

They did hear the minister say, “Will you, Maria, take this man, Bill, to be your lawful wedded husband . . . ?” “And do you, Bill, take this woman, Maria, to be your lawful wedded wife . . . ?”

They also heard: “I now pronounce you



First comes infatuation

husband and wife. You may kiss the bride.” Oohs and aahs filled the room as attending married couples relived their former marriage ceremonies through this romantic soirée. Bill and Maria gently embraced, kissed, smiled to each other and began to hurriedly walk down the aisle surrounded by a throng of well-wishers.

For at least six months, Bill and Maria were on cloud nine. Slowly they began to experience what all marriages face—

familiarity. They began to look at each other’s shortcomings, together with the demanding pressures of their jobs and family. They had forgotten some special keys that help make a marriage happy.

Fast forward to 10th anniversary

At Bill and Maria’s 10th wedding anniversary, they were happier than they had ever been. They spent quality time together, even dated each other, and showed mutual love and respect. But let’s look back a couple of years before this time.

Just two years earlier their marriage was on the rocks, and they were contemplating separation and possible divorce. Thankfully, their two children—ages 7 and 5—caused them to rethink divorce. They both agreed to get marriage counseling and work out their disagreements.

Although it didn’t happen overnight, they began to work at their marriage, especially on behalf of their children. They began to realize there were certain keys that opened the door to a happier marriage, and it amazed them to realize how a happy marriage, like a happy life, takes work. They literally *made* themselves happier.

Turning things around

Eroding, corruptive selfishness, being

right all the time, looking to each other's weaknesses rather than strengths—these all are subtle enemies of a happy marriage. One day Bill and Maria woke up and realized that they should and could make their marriage work. They accepted their responsibilities toward one another and *made* their marriage work.

Why do some marriages revive and survive while others plummet to what seems to be an inescapable vortex of misery, separation and divorce? How can you overcome the many natural enemies of a happy marriage?

Here we will explore five keys to a happy marriage. Happy marriages are made, not born. These five keys will work for you—if you put them to work. You can overcome the common enemies of a happy marriage.

1. Realize true love is more than chemistry or infatuation

One of the greatest mistakes two people make, especially two younger people, is to confuse infatuation with true love. Infatuation is the strong chemistry, or powerful

Family and marriage therapist and relationship consultant Dr. Pat Love, in her book *The Truth About Love* (2001), discusses the differences between the common sex drive, infatuation and true love:

"From the outset it is important to distinguish infatuation from sex drive, which is simply the craving for sexual gratification. Humans can feel the urge for sex with someone without having romantic inclinations. When you are aroused, any number of partners can give you simple sexual relief.

"Infatuation is different. You can be attracted to a number of people but infatuated with only one at a time. Infatuation is characterized by focused attention on a specific partner. When you are infatuated with someone, only this person can give you those euphoric 'in love' feelings . . .

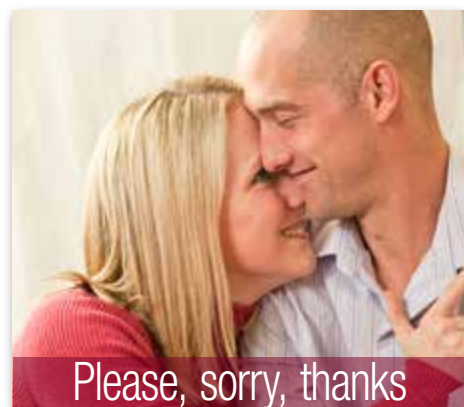
"Infatuation is merely the earliest stage of love. Do not mistake this temporary power surge for a permanent condition, or confuse it with true love" (pp. 27, 31).

True love begins after the post-rapture state of infatuation, when the novelty of the

relationship by offering endearing responses and/or wishes to each other.

(One might get a rather different impression from modern media, which fixes our attention on different and often strange relationships, attempting to influence the viewer with "modern," unbiblical ideas of marriage.)

Although there are any numbers of endearing responses that a husband and wife can say to each other, we'll discuss three: "Please," "I'm sorry," and "Thank



Please, sorry, thanks



True love takes work

love cocktail, that brings a male and female together. True love is not a sexual feeling that suddenly demands to be satisfied or a romantic desire to be with one person.

These are not true love, though they exist in stepwise progression to the ultimate state of true love. God created the sexual impulse and mutual attraction between male and female. This love cocktail helps bring men and women together.

When a male and female come together and suddenly become inexplicably starry-eyed and euphoric, they are experiencing infatuation, an amorous condition common to most men and women at some point in their lives.

Why do some marriages revive and survive while others plummet to what seems to be an inescapable vortex of misery, separation and divorce?

new wears off and familiarity sets in. Some marriage partners become confused about this stage, assuming falsely that they chose the wrong mate. In fact, this is the point of a marriage when the reality of true love can set in. This is a *common process* in all marital relationships.

The Creator draws two people together through the normal chemistry of the body. From that point on, a husband and wife must begin to actually *work* on a happier marriage. True love comes from wisdom, experience and outgoing concern for the other person. It comes when a husband and wife settle into a shared relationship where each one gives of themselves to their partner and their marriage.

2. Use endearing responses

It may sound trite these days, but courtesy and kindness go a long way. Marriage partners can certainly improve their rela-

you." Sound simple? They *are* simple, but they are often difficult to say.

Please. A husband can assert himself as the head of the house, but if he does he runs the risk of turning off his wife and children. They may honor his demands, but deep down they might also resent his approach. People respond better if you ask them to do something followed or preceded by "please."

Wives seem more predisposed to saying "please" than husbands do, perhaps because women are more nurturing, as God designed. No matter, whether male or female, if you want your spouse to respond favorably to your request (and please make it a request and not a demand), add to your request, "please." This will do wonders for your marriage, and you might even get what you asked for.

I'm sorry. When you say to your mate that you're sorry that things didn't go well



The Bible and You

in your last discussion, you are immediately showing sensitivity, concern and respect for her or him. This assumes, of course, that you mean it and are not simply saying these words for effect, so as to manipulate or control your mate.

Conventional wisdom tells us that saying “I’m sorry” to one’s mate might only encourage his or her selfish demeanor. That could be true. But even if it does, saying you’re sorry helps you to have peace of mind and sets a good example for the one who hasn’t. Some people simply have more difficulty admitting they are or were wrong.

Consider this: Two wrongs never make a right, and no one can be right every time a disagreement surfaces. If one is trying to follow the Bible after a disagreement, then he or she is attempting to make peace. God loves peacemakers—they shall inherit the earth as children of God! (Matthew 5:5, 9).

Peace doesn’t come naturally. It must be deliberately pursued, with God in mind: “Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:18). Saying “I’m sorry” to your loved one won’t make you sorry. It will give you peace, make you happier and help your mate.

Thank you. Another endearing phrase a married couple can lavishly spend on each other is to say “Thank you.” How many times a day do we have this opportunity? Let me count the ways. When you say “Thank you,” *mean it*. There are few more gratifying acts that a person can perform than to show an attitude of gratitude—especially toward one’s spouse.

Some of the smallest things in life reap the greatest benefits. People respond very well to someone who says “Thank you” for what they’ve done or are doing. People sometimes desire hearing “Thank you” more than receiving money, as strange as that might sound. We *need* to be appreciated and respected.

When your wife cleans the kitchen, remember to say “Thank you.” When she washes your clothes, remember to say “Thank you.” When she prepares a meal, don’t forget to say “Thank you.” When she works hard to help provide for the family, say “Thank you.”

Tell your husband “Thank you” when he mows the lawn. Say “Thank you” when he helps with grocery shopping. If he helps you to set the table or clear it, say “Thank you.” When he does something special or

fun for the family, say “Thank you.”

God loves gratitude. Being truly thankful helps others to love and respect us. Being thankful to God for His many gifts helps guarantee eternal life. We cannot get through this life without God and each other. We all need help, and *that* comes from others.

An attitude of gratitude is important in our lives and never more important than in our marriages. Thank you for considering this thought. Show your spouse that you care for him or her with these endearing responses.

3. Make sure your communication says “I care”

Do you show concern to your mate when you communicate with him or her? This might seem so mundane to you that you



Good communication practices make for happier marriages. Your mate will love you for listening and for empathically trying to understand him or her.

might dismiss it without any consideration. That would be a big mistake. Good communication with your mate shows that you are listening to him or her—you are showing respect.

When your mate is relating something to you, try not to ignore him or her. Instead take the time and deliberately show interest in what your spouse is saying, which is important to him or her. And it’s not wrong for the person listening to question what’s being said in order to clarify what he or she is hearing. That’s just good, constructive conversation.

Attentive acknowledgement is also of great help. I often respond with “I hear you,” or “I’m listening” or “I understand.” Sometimes I say “Can you go into more

detail about this?” to encourage her to fully express her feelings. These are important signifiers of respect and concern for our mates.

Good communication practices make for happier marriages. Your mate will love you for listening and for empathically trying to understand him or her.

Your marriage will become more secure if your communication says: “I care about you. You’re important to me.” Make sure your communication shows that you care for your mate.

4. Allow your marriage to mature

The Bible speaks clearly and decisively about our becoming mature, and that maturity takes patience. Conversely, we, because of our selfish nature, often look for instant gratification. Yet patience has a perfect work to perform, as we voluntarily choose to allow it to rule in our lives. That we must do.

Are you like the person who asked God for many different things and then demanded, “And God, give me patience and give it to me now!”? Almost everyone knows that patience doesn’t come overnight. Patience develops over a lifetime of experiences, some good and some bad. We learn patience through faith and hope in God, based on His promises.

There is no better or more critical place to build maturity through patience than in



marriage. When a man and woman meet and the sparks start to fly, patience is the last thing they think about. Later, when those sparks fall back to earth, they can

burn our backsides (1 Corinthians 3:13-15). In other words, if we fail to recognize the importance of patience needed to have a happy marriage, our marriage will not mature as God intended.

Sadly, most couples don't consider the need for their marriage to mature. They simply assume that it will always ride the crest of infatuation. They do not realize or accept that when the new wears off, truth sets in. About 50 percent of all marriages can't handle the truth. And the truth about marriage is the truth about happier relationships: It takes a lot of give and take, not take and take.

God encourages patience: "But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:4). Mature patience satisfies

withered and were beyond repair.

My counseling with them began with small talk about the weather, news, things like that. Then we got into how long they had been married, what brought them together, their children, their jobs, and their extended families and friends. This took some time, and the more we engaged in communication, the more they began to relax. As we progressed, we searched for mutual likes.

Then we addressed earlier times when they were in love and easily agreed with one another—how and why this time came naturally to them. After discussing the good times, we began to address the not-so-good times, like when they felt they began to disagree with one another. Although this was uncomfortable for them, they did openly

Did you know that you were created and designed to have a happy marriage? God created us to mutually submit ourselves to each other.



any uncomfortable situation, especially when you've been treated badly, though this is not easy. With God's help, you and I can learn to let patience have its perfect work in us.

Don't be ruled by the desire for instant gratification. God wants us to learn to be patient with our mates. Allow your mate to be your best friend. Show respect for each other. Exercise patience. Allow your marriage to mature.

5. Strive to revive your marriage

I've seen the repair and restoration of marriages that appeared to be headed straight for divorce. One couple in particular, we'll call them George and Ellen, assumed that divorce was the only way out and that their former feelings of love had

discuss when they began to disagree and for what reasons.

Their interactive communication began to show how familiarity had set in. They began to take one another for granted. No more roses. No more meeting him at the door. No more turning the bed back at night. No more coffee and conversation every morning.

No more hugs and kisses. No more holding hands. No more sitting beside each other on the couch, watching TV or reading a book. No more endearing thoughts expressed each day, like "I love you honey," or "Have a great day," or "I'll call you to see how your day is going."

Finally I asked them to write down one thing they would like their mate to change, and why. I also asked them to date once a week, like they had done before their marriage, since part of their fear focused on the fact that they had no time for each other: He was consumed with his job, she with the kids and housework.

The next counseling visit was remarkable! They came in with totally different demeanors and were visiting, smiling and laughing. I was encouraged.

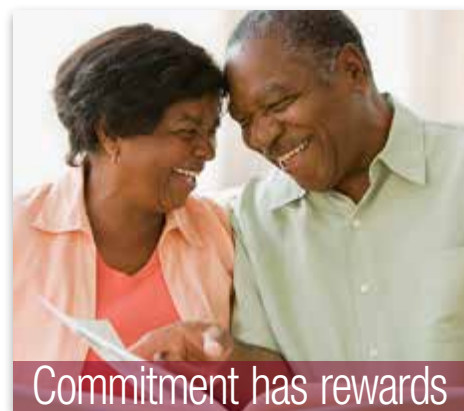
They began to date once a week, and before they knew it, they found themselves happier than they had been for years. They began to revel in one another's company. George and Ellen revived their marriage!

You were designed to have a happy marriage!

Did you know that you were created and designed to have a happy marriage? God created us to mutually submit ourselves to each other. Of the wife He said that her desire would be for her husband (Genesis 3:16). Of the husband, God said in effect that his desire to take care of his wife should match Jesus Christ's care for the Church (Ephesians 5:25-28).

Realize and remember that the first stage toward marriage is the God-given chemistry of the "love cocktail," followed by infatuation and then a post-rapture condition. At the latter point, true love can begin.

You cannot get to true love without first going through these stages: chemistry, infatuation and the post-rapture condition.



The third stage here is the "get real" period, the time God has given us to add mutual respect to amorous love.

The five keys to a happy or happier marriage are worth your time and effort to help open the door to marital bliss. You can do it!

Indeed, intelligent, sensitive and sometimes rigorous true love in this life is the basis of the ultimate purpose for marriage, which God has designed for all humanity, for now and forever! **GN**

Learn More

The Bible has a great deal to say about marriage. And that's not surprising, since it was God Himself who created marriage! If you'd like to learn more about our Creator's instruction about marriage, download or request our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* today. And be sure to read the accompanying article "The Ultimate Purpose for Marriage," beginning on page 8.



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The Ultimate Purpose of Marriage



Our current age of instant gratification can wreck a marriage. Marriage was designed with a great purpose and goal. Knowing the ultimate purpose for marriage can help you change your marriage for now and forever. *by Jerold Aust*

Do you know the ultimate purpose for marriage? In a number of Western nations, up to about half of all marriages fail. This alone suggests that most married couples don't know why the institution of marriage exists. Even worse, they don't know its ultimate purpose.

How often have you heard men and women talk about their marriages in a less than complimentary way? Some couch their thoughts and feelings about marriage in humor, doubt or sexual innuendoes.

Why do they characterize marriage in these terms? Why does the marriage state begin in a state of bliss and end in a black hole of misery? Why would a man and woman look to the wedding ceremony as a defining act of their lives, only to wind up making jokes about it and scorning it?

There are good reasons for this paradox. To understand, we must come to recognize what's behind the institution of marriage—and what's behind efforts to subvert and destroy it.

Institution of marriage

In the beginning of God's plan for humankind, He refurbished the earth (Genesis 1:2), making it habitable for all living things (Genesis 1:21-31). Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . ." (Genesis 1:27). That statement gives us a clue as to the ultimate purpose for the marriage

institution. We'll get back to that later.

God created Adam from the dust of the ground and Eve from Adam's rib. Next, God brought them together to unite them in holy matrimony:

"And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

"And Adam said: 'This is now bone of

Marriage, wonderfully designed by an all-loving God, typifies the of the marriage of Christ to the Church.

my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:21-24).

God sanctified the divine institution of marriage when He joined together the first man and woman. Only God can institute and sanctify the marital union. No human being can.

Ruth's story demonstrates devotion to another person

The bottom line in the biblical story of Ruth is faithfulness and commitment. Ruth

was the daughter-in-law of Naomi and the wife of Boaz. After Naomi lost her husband and her two sons in Moab, she decided to return to Bethlehem. Naomi urged her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab.

One daughter-in-law turned back, but Ruth refused to leave. Her words of devotion have graced wedding ceremonies for years: "But Ruth said: 'Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me'" (Ruth 1:16-17).

Ruth's expressed commitment and faithfulness to her friendship and family bond

with Naomi is what husbands and wives should have for one another—except that the marriage bond is to be an even closer union.

The ultimate purpose for and goal of marriage

The apostle Paul perceptively shared with us the greater reality that the marriage relationship represents—that the *Church of God will become at one with Jesus Christ in a divine marriage*. Christ, as the Groom, prepares His betrothed Bride for the great wedding supper. Notice what Paul wrote:

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify

and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

“So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

“*This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.* Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:25-33; emphasis added throughout).

In the book of Revelation, Christ reveals that He is going to marry the Church: “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for *the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.* And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he

said to me, ‘Write: *Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!*’” (Revelation 19:7-9).

Physically, marriage is designed for human beings *so we can learn to love one another* and our families that come from this wonderful, God-designed relationship. Marriages are made, not born. In this life, both the husband and wife work at their marriages, sharing with and sacrificing for each other (Ephesians 5:21-28).

Human marriages, wonderfully designed by an all-loving God, typify the reality and fulfillment of the marriage of Christ to the Church. This is the ultimate purpose of marriage.

At Jesus’ return, Christ’s Bride will have made herself ready, as we’ve already seen (Revelation 19:7). The Church makes herself ready by obeying God’s laws in faith (James 2:24, 26), putting God first in her life and loving her neighbor as herself (Matthew 22:36-40).

Image, interloper and a wedding divine

Earlier in this article I mentioned that I would address how God makes us in His image. I also mentioned a force that strives to destroy God’s holy institution of marriage.

First, let’s address our being made in His image.

Our bodily form is an aspect of God’s image (compare Revelation 1:14-17; 1 John 3:2). But more importantly, God the Father, through Jesus Christ, is remaking us in His spiritual image, which includes the spiritual character we build through God’s Spirit of truth (compare John 16:13-15; Galatians 2:20).

The institution of marriage is a major way in which God recreates us in His spiritual image (Genesis 1:27; 1 Peter 3:1-9; Philippians 1:6). He is creating in us His righteous character and His oneness with Him (John 17:22). Our physical bodies won’t last (2 Corinthians 4:16); only spiritual character will (1 John 2:15-17).

Secondly, regarding the subverting of marriage and family, you should be aware that Satan the devil is twisting the marriage union beyond recognition. He has blinded the majority of mankind from seeing the pristine truth about God, His glorious gospel and the institution of marriage.

He influences humanity to destroy itself because he knows our potential in Christ’s Kingdom and family (1 Corinthians 2:9). Satan *cannot* destroy us (Job 1:12; Luke 22:31-32). However, he *can* influence us to destroy ourselves. This helps explain why the institution of marriage is continuously under attack.

At His return, Jesus Christ will marry the Church in a divine wedding. God gave the institution of marriage to help us understand the deep, loving relationship we will share with Jesus Christ for eternity in His Kingdom. You can now work at making your marriage happier (see “Five Keys to a Happy Marriage” beginning on page 4) as you prepare for the ultimate purpose of marriage—the marriage of God’s Church to His Holy Son, Jesus Christ! **GN**

What About **Divorce**?

The prophet Malachi prophesied against modern societies that would exist shortly before the return of Jesus Christ. Speaking through him, God expressed his view of the modern miscarriage of marriage.

“‘For I hate divorce!’ says the LORD, the God of Israel. ‘To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty,’ says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies” (Malachi 2:16; New Living Translation). Today, if a marriage relationship doesn’t remain exciting, the normal course of action is to divorce and remarry. But this is not God’s desire and design!

In Scripture we see that Moses permitted a bill of divorce because of constant sinfulness and selfishness. But Jesus Christ addressed this problem further:

“The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?’ And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?” So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.’

“They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?’ He said to them, ‘Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.’ And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery” (Matthew 19:3-9).

Divorce cuts to the heart of God’s design of people being at one. God is all about oneness of mind and heart, most importantly with Him. Notice Jesus’ final prayer to God the Father immediately before His crucifixion: “That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21). God is *for* intimate relationships, not the severing of relationships.

Learn More

Marriage isn’t a human institution, but a divine relationship designed by our Creator, God Himself! He has given that divine relationship to us as a gift to help us better understand His ultimate purpose for us. To learn more, be sure to download or request your free copy of the booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*.



Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download it from our website.

www.GNmagazine.org/booklets



Current Events & Trends

by John Ross Schroeder and Jerold Aust

Syria's civil war spills over its borders

Successful containment of any major difficulty normally means a much better chance of concluding it. But what was a national Syrian conflict has become so prolonged that it now rages well beyond its borders and even threatens yet another major Middle Eastern war. Nations parry and thrust at each other like wild beasts. Verbal threats are all too common. The psalmist asks, "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?" (Psalm 2:1).

Wrote Patrick Cockburn in the *London Review of Books*: "Over the last year a military stalemate has prevailed, with each side launching offensives in the areas where they are strongest. Both sides have had definite but limited successes" ("Is It the End of Sykes-Picot?" June 6, 2013). Lately foreign countries (and groups within countries) are intensifying their interventions on either one side or the other. Now Syrian President Bashar al-Assad or the rebel groups could possibly gain the upper hand in the near future.

USA Today reported: "The Syrian civil war is increasingly drawing in nations across the Middle East, a region-wide conflict that threatens to pit world powers against each other" ("Syria's Deepening Sectarian War Bleeds Across Borders," May 29, emphasis added throughout). President Assad and the various rebel groups have their backers. Russia and Iran have delivered sophisticated weapons to Damascus, and Israel has used precision air strikes to destroy some of them. Thousands of Hezbollah soldiers have actively intervened on Assad's side and pulled Lebanon into this brutal civil war.

August peace talks are planned by the United States and Russia, but so far rebel groups have apparently

declined to participate. Another *USA Today* communique (this one from Jerusalem) stated, "Israel warned Thursday that it needed to prepare for a 'new era' of



August 2012: the Syrian town of Azaz after government aerial bombings.

war in the Middle East as the Syrian regime claimed the first shipment of anti-aircraft missiles from Russia had arrived" ("Syria Says It Has Advanced Missiles From Russia," June 1). The Syrian foreign minister warned that Damascus "will retaliate immediately" if Israel strikes Syria again.

The dogs of savage wars bring untold suffering and death to any country so afflicted. "Barbarity is now commonplace in the Syrian war. Some 80,000 Syrians have been killed since the Arab Spring arrived in March 2011, and unknown numbers have been tortured and maimed" (Victor Davis Hanson, "Why Some Wars Are So Savage," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 29). Meanwhile Jordan strives to cope with some 500,000 refugees from Syria.

Since its inception *The Good News* has kept abreast of major events in the Middle East and explained their overall meaning in the light of biblical prophecy. This strategic region remains the key to the fulfillment of many end-time prophecies leading up to the second coming of Jesus Christ. The United Church of God also

publishes a comprehensive free booklet exploring the region's historic and prophetic legacy. Download or ask for *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: *London Review of Books*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*.)

Israel seriously impacted by conflict

According to a *Sunday Times* report from Tel Aviv: "Syria has put its most advanced missiles on standby with orders to hit Tel Aviv if Israel launches another raid on its territory . . . An Israeli official told *The New York Times* that Israel, which has launched three recent attacks on Syria, was considering further strikes and warned President Bashar al-Assad that his government would face 'crippling consequences' if he hit back at Israel" ("Syria Ready to Unleash Missiles on Israel," May 19, 2013).

A *Jewish Chronicle* headline refers to a potential "meltdown" in the Middle East ("Putin Arms Sale Threatens Meltdown in Middle East," May 30). Several observers muse about what result would actually benefit Israel. Another *Jewish Chronicle* article bears this title: "As World Scraps Over Which Syrian Army to Back, It's Lose-Lose for Israel" (John Bradley, May 30).

As this article reports, some Israeli officials were arguing that "a weakened Mr Assad, ruling over a barely functioning state, would be preferable . . . to outright chaos, regional war or an Islamic theocracy hell-bent on Israel's destruction."

The same article further states, "Tens of thousands of foreign jihadis, including many from Western countries, are already fighting in Syria [along with the rebels], armed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar."

The Golan Heights—the northeastern region of Israel bordering Syria—has once again become a flashpoint. Some villagers there fear that war is imminent. Israeli troops and artillery units have assembled near there, with Syrian forces camped on the other side of the border.

It is high time to remind ourselves of just who remains *ultimately* in control over all these frightening events. Don't forget that God also has His own armies (see 2 Kings 6:14-17; Matthew 26:52-53). He has said, "Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand . . .'*" (Isaiah 46:9-10).

Nothing will happen anywhere that our Creator does not allow to occur. Our Christian responsibility remains to follow Jesus Christ's instruction in Luke 21:34-36, watching and praying always. (Sources: *The Jewish Chronicle*, *The Times* [London].)

Jihadist rhetoric and reality

The Associated Press recently reported: "Intelligence agencies that have succeeded in thwarting many of al-Qaida's plans for spectacular attacks are struggling to combat the terror network's strategy of encouraging followers to keep to themselves, use off-the-shelf weapons and strike when they see an opportunity.

"In recent weeks—at the Boston Marathon, in the streets of London and in the shadow of one of Paris' most recognizable monuments—young men allegedly carried out attacks with little help, using inexpensive, widely available knives and explosives from everyday ingredients. In each of the attacks, suspects had previously been flagged to law enforcement and deemed not to be a priority . . .

"Confronting an overwhelming sea of mostly harmless individuals who act suspiciously, authorities are

still struggling with questions about how and how much to keep tabs on people who spout jihadist rhetoric online or buy material that could be used to make explosives—or something innocuous ("Intel Dilemma in Boston, London, Paris Attacks," May 31, 2013).

How much should authorities keep tabs on people who spout jihadist rhetoric?

As this report indicates, Western nations accept immigrants who can turn against them. Europe, particularly Germany and France and even Britain, is now beginning to see a backlash of Islamic extremists who exercise the rights of citizenship. This makes it very difficult for these governments to control jihadists who threaten their way of life. (Source: Associated Press.)

In danger: the status of the U.S. dollar

The American dollar has long reigned as easily the largest percentage of the global currency supply. But its current percentage lead of 62 percent has been shrinking. Other currencies like the Japanese yen, the Swiss franc and the Chinese yuan have been making gains. One credible authority predicted that the dollar's defrocking may occur in five to ten years.

The American budget deficit (\$1 trillion plus annually over recent years) makes for dire consequences if the United States loses its premier standing in world currency reserves. Dick Bove, vice president of equity research at Rafferty Capital Markets, firmly warned, "If the dollar loses status as the world's most reliable currency the United States will lose the right to print money to pay its debt. It will be forced to pay this debt" (quoted in "Is the Dollar Dying? Why US Currency Is in Danger," CNBC.com, Feb. 14).

Bove went on to say that the U.S. Congress and the president "are demonstrating a total lack of fiscal credibility."

Other voices are also sounding the alarm, but hopes for a continuous American economic recovery and recent stock market highs have muted these warnings somewhat. Yet in the long term, other countries are seeking ways to diversify away from dependence on the U.S. dollar. Fairly recent quantitative easing (or money printing) to the tune of \$3 trillion foments worry.

Michael Pento, president of Pento Portfolio Strategies, strongly stated: "It's a thousand times more important than a nuclear bomb being tested by North Korea . . . that we keep the dollar as the world's reserve currency, and yet we are doing everything to abuse that status" (ibid.).

Still one might counter: The American housing market looks much more encouraging, consumer spending is up and unemployment is gradually dropping. Yet Liam Halligan's column in *The Telegraph* peers deeper into analyzing U.S. data, stating:

"America's nominal GDP grew \$140bn during the first three months of 2013. Over the same period, the US Treasury issued \$340bn of new [sovereign] debt. Had that not happened, America's national income would have shrunk \$200bn over the first quarter" ("Lack of Genuine Reform Is Sowing Seeds of Next Crisis," June 1).

The shocking potential of U.S. financial woes are but one symptom of America's national decline. To understand much more, download or request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. (Sources: CNBC.com, *The Telegraph* [London].)

Nation-states struggle with immigration

Week-long nighttime rioting in Stockholm, Sweden, and a surrounding suburb plunged Scandinavia into the chaotic social unrest that has already afflicted a number of other European regions, including France and Greece. As in Paris, the perpetrators are usually Muslim immigrants. The scale and the intensity of the rioting has caused some observers to question the common belief that

"Immigration will change the US in ways its politicians are only just beginning to grasp."

Sweden has treated immigrants much better than most other European countries.

Turkey has also experienced major riots in a number of cities, although immigration is not necessarily a major causal factor. Apparently there is widespread dissatisfaction with the government in power and the prime minister in particular. It's

hard to be both a Western-style democracy and an Islamist state at the same time. The two don't fit together well.

Most nations have their share of disaffected immigrants, including the United States. The drophead of a London *Times* article by BBC Radio 4 presenter Justin Webb states, "Immigration will change the US in ways its politicians are only just beginning to grasp" (June 4). The article is titled, "America's Future Is Latino, Asian and Liberal." Future North American demographics are slated to lean much more toward Central and South America.

The Anglo-Saxon vote is no longer expected to be a deciding factor in future U.S. presidential elections. Immigrants who have or will obtain citizenship and voting rights may well impact future elections in a big way. If and when the funds run out and the government can no longer print money legally (see "In danger: the status of the U.S. dollar"), we could possibly see massive rioting in major American cities on a scale and intensity that will shock the world and perhaps bring the nation to its knees. (Source: *The Times* [London].)

Christianity on the wane in America

R.R. Reno, editor of the journal *First Things*, concerning religion in public life, said this in a speech given Feb. 20, 2013, as adapted in the Hillsdale College speech digest *Imprimis*:

"Religious liberty is being redefined in America, or at least many would like it to be. Our secular establishment wants to reduce the autonomy of religious institutions and limit the influence of faith in the public square. The reason is not hard to grasp. In America, 'religion' largely means Christianity, and today our secular culture views orthodox Christian churches as troublesome, retrograde, and reactionary forces" (April 2013).

Traditional Christian morality is under growing attack in the United States. For instance, Reno further stated: "In striking down Texas sodomy laws, Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy noted that moral censure of homosexuality has 'been shaped by religious beliefs'" —the biblical basis of moral censure now considered a bad thing. Increasingly only modern secular views are acceptable in law and jurisprudence today. The influence of the Bible and the Christian religion has been consigned to the past.

One author with a bleak outlook on life described the global human condition as being in "a godless world, without hope." The spiritual quality of hope seems to be hardwired into our very beings. Without

it our lives soon become empty and virtually meaningless. We lose our moorings. And an America largely devoid of Christian standards will become a hopeless spiritual wasteland.

Reno also declared, as recorded in *Imprimis*: "America's Founders . . . agreed as a matter of principle that the law of God trumps the law of men. This

"Our secular culture views orthodox Christian churches as troublesome, retrograde, and reactionary forces."

has obvious political implications: The Declaration of Independence appeals to the unalienable rights given by our Creator that cannot be overridden or taken away . . .

"Put somewhat differently, religion gives us a place to stand outside politics, and without it we're vulnerable to a system in which the state defines everything, which is the essence of tyranny. That is why gay marriage, which is sold as an expansion of freedom, is in fact a profound threat to liberty."

Yet whatever the direction of the nation as a whole, you individually can live a lawful life filled with hope. If you would like some help, download or request our free booklets *Making Life Work* and *The Ten Commandments*. (Source: *Imprimis*.)

How can you make sense of the news?

So much is happening in the world, and so quickly. Where are today's dramatic and dangerous trends taking us? What does Bible prophecy reveal about our future? You're probably very concerned with the direction the world is heading. So are we. That's one reason we produce the *Beyond Today* daily TV commentaries—to help you understand the news in the light of Bible prophecy. This eye-opening program offers you a perspective so badly needed in our confused world—the perspective of God's Word. Visit us at ucg.org/beyond-today/daily!





The Boston Marathon Bombing Opens a Window on All Time



Smoke from a homemade bomb drifts from the point of explosion, center left, across the Boston Marathon finish line at the top center of this picture.

The cold-blooded attack on innocent bystanders at the Boston Marathon didn't come out of nowhere. It's one of many tragedies that should give us pause and cause us to contemplate several lessons about life. *by Darris McNeely*

Strange as it may sound, on April 15, 2013, the lives of hundreds of Bostonians were forever changed because a long-dead Chechen warlord had been determined to withstand incursions from a long-dead Russian czar who sent waves of slaughter across a land of those who would not yield to anyone.

As happened on the streets of Boston, scenes of mindless terror often originate among peoples and circumstances far beyond what we know, imagine or care about. Seeds of hate and evil find fertile ground and sprout where bitter winds of war and terror blow them—and today no one can give a clear understanding of why.

When two nail- and shrapnel-laden bombs exploded near the finish line of the Boston Marathon, three lives were snuffed out and more than a hundred bystanders were maimed, some grievously. Four days later, after the bombers murdered another man, one of them was killed and the second was captured while hiding in a boat parked in a suburban backyard.

"A window on all time"

If we delve into the heart of this drama, we begin to see that what ended in Boston on a bright spring day began in key respects in the darkest mountains of the Caucasus hundreds of years ago.

The bloody conflict that occurred then between Russian rulers and their unyielding Muslim opponents would, over time, nourish a centuries-long hostility that eventually boiled over in the deadly plotting of two young brothers of Chechen descent who took out their grievances on innocent bystanders watching a race on a sunny spring day in Boston.

These were not the first acts of terror, and they certainly won't be the last. Each of these moments of horror is the fruit of thousands of years of a conflict-ridden world. And the American author Thomas Wolfe wrote with great insight, "Every moment is a window on all time."

I have had a different reaction to this latest terrorist act—one unlike how I've felt about any previous attack. My paraphrase above of Thomas Wolfe's opening lines from his novel *Look Homeward Angel* sums up how I feel, and it comes a little closer to a biblical understanding that gives more

comfort than anything else I've read—or likely will ever read.

Today's journalists, pundits and observers frankly miss the mark in trying to give coherent analysis of why such insane acts continually mutate in our modern world. Indiscriminate killing in the name of religion or political ideology has long been with us—as it always will be until the return of Jesus Christ. And always until then people will ask, "How can such unspeakable evil exist in the world?" and "Why do the innocent suffer at the hands of such vile people?"

The Boston victims included a restaurant manager, a graduate student, a police officer and an 8-year-old boy who was standing at the finish line of the race to cheer on his dad. All were innocent victims forever linked by this one moment of evil.

They didn't know each other and likely never would have crossed paths in this life. They were attending a world-renowned event, oblivious to any notion that the air around them would be shattered by the blast wave of a crude but deadly weapon assembled in someone's kitchen—without

same issues and questions in a long-ago time and place. He saw the futility of life when tranquility was shattered by random acts of human nature or even nature itself. He concluded that "one thing happens to all"—that evil and madness occur and then all go to the grave. The righteous and the evil all must face the same end of life, and before it occurs much of what takes place is subject to events beyond one's control.

The writer is King Solomon of ancient Israel, and his great writing on this theme is the book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible. Much about this book is misunderstood. I prefer to read it as the journal of a king who spent his life searching for the same answers you and I seek today.

The king looked around and saw evil and suffering, righteousness and pleasure. He participated in all of it just to find out what worked best for him. He had enough money to buy and build whatever he desired. He searched for the wisdom of his day, compiled and studied it, and was considered by all his peers to be the wisest of all.

Listen to what he said: "Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did

but that of a man who knew the divine reason for life yet had to go out to test and try everything and "see for himself."

I think Solomon even witnessed in his day actions of violence and unexplainable natural catastrophe that took countless lives. No one had answers, not even he the king. Why evil? Why suffering? These are the questions of the ages. "Live joyfully with the wife whom you love," Solomon observed (Ecclesiastes 9:9). "Eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart" (verse 7). "For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing," he dryly commented (verse 5).

And in one cold but clear admission he concluded: "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all. For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them" (verses 11-12).

Accept it or reject it, believe it or scoff—this statement is real, and it gives understanding beyond the headlines and events of this life. Events of life beyond our control occur, and we are caught in a net like the fish or the birds—life perhaps even extinguished and seemingly without meaning.

And yet, there is meaning. God is in ultimate control. Nothing that happens is beyond His sovereign choice to allow it to happen or not. As Solomon declared right before, "For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God" (verse 1). God is working out a great plan, which time and chance will not thwart.

And there is hope in Solomon's conclusion about the affairs of all life in this realm called earth: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Yes, there is a God, and His judgment is a fact of life. Judgment is part of the hope of this life, for without it there is no hope of justice. It is when life is darkest and despair the sharpest that the hope of God's justice—which ultimately includes setting the world right—offers a glimmer of light to pierce the gloom. That is what Solomon concluded after a lifetime of reflection. **GN**

Events of life beyond our control occur, and we are caught in a net like the fish or the birds—life perhaps even extinguished and seemingly without meaning. And yet, there is meaning.

any remorse or shame for the grief, agony and bloody chaos they hoped to create.

So if this moment is "a window on all time," then what are we to learn? How are we to understand this? As much as the pundits and "experts" can contribute to the discussion, even they, in the middle of the cold dark night, admit they have no real answers.

I once read the conclusions of a criminal psychiatrist who, after hundreds of prison interviews with cold-blooded killers of all stripes, admitted he had to go against the "wisdom" of his profession and admit that evil existed in this world and that there's no other way to explain the horror committed by one human being upon another. Another writer who has witnessed firsthand the human effect of such violence seems to admit the questions are endless and almost unknowable.

Ancient wisdom recorded for us

That's why in the face of this event I turned to another writer who faced the

not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11).

This may sound pessimistic, but hold off for a minute. It's actually one of the most profound bits of wisdom you and I can learn, and we'll see how it fits into a workable, realistic and hopeful assessment of what this world and human life is all about.

What did this wise man conclude?

Solomon writes of a life that wove in and out just about every religion, philosophy and lifestyle available. He says he sampled everything: "Whatever my eye desired I did not keep from them." As he recorded his observations, his prose is laced with observations on how others lived and learned. His view of God is not atheistic or agnostic



“Parent One” and “Parent Two”: The Unraveling of the Traditional Family

A war is under way against marriage and family. Who is behind it? How is the battle being waged? What are the stakes? And who will ultimately win? *by Janet Treadway*

The family is under attack as never before in history. Abortion takes the lives of millions of innocent unborn children before they can even draw their first breath. Divorce shatters families in the millions. And millions more people live together before marriage, not realizing that their lack of commitment before marriage increases the odds that their relationship will fail even if they decide to marry later.

The latest attack comes in the form of redefining or abolishing traditional male and female roles. It isn't enough that gay-marriage advocates push to redefine marriage and that movies, music and TV glorify promiscuity and ridicule traditional roles. Now these roles are being abolished altogether.

Courtesy of the federal government, “father” and “mother” are on the way out, being replaced with the new politically correct terms “parent one” and “parent two.”

The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) has announced that it will replace the gender-specific terms “mother” and “father” in the 2014-15 federal student aid application form with “parent one” and “parent two.” The new language is aimed at accommodating students who have grown up in households headed by homosexual couples, according to a statement released by the DOE.

Political correctness vs. the Bible

How low has a country sunk when even the words “mother” and “father” are no longer correct terms to use? To be politically correct, do we also change what God said in Exodus 20:12 from “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (New International Version) to “Honor your ‘parent one’ and your ‘parent two’”?

And how do we decide who is parent one and who is parent two? If parent one and parent two split up, who becomes the new parent one and parent two?

This is clearly against the intentions of our Creator, who inspired this passage in Proverbs 1:8: “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching” (NIV). Perhaps to be politically correct this proverb should read, “Listen, my son, to your parent one’s instruction, and do not forsake your parent two’s teaching.”

Who’s really behind anti-family movements?

The question that comes to mind is who is really behind all of this political correctness, and why? There’s plenty of blame to go around—the gay rights movement’s efforts to redefine marriage, liberal judges who allow women to kill their own unborn babies through abortion, purveyors of perversion who systematically undermine long-held values. Yet the fact is, in effect they’re all just puppets in someone else’s hands. But whose? Who hates the family so much to wage a war against it?

In the pages of *The Good News* we’re not afraid to point the finger at exactly who it is who’s ultimately leading efforts to destroy the family. The guilty party is Satan the devil, the arch-deceiver of old.

Satan hates the institutions of marriage and family so much that he has declared war on them, attacking relentlessly with the many tools at his disposal. This unseen being isn’t a fairy tale, as some think. He is all too real (download or request our free booklet *Is There Really a Devil?*).

Ephesians 6:12 shows the power Satan and his demonic accomplices can have over us: “*For our struggle is not against flesh*

and blood [other human beings], but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (NIV, emphasis added throughout).

Consider some of Satan’s accomplishments over recent decades. So far he has managed to take God out of schools and removed mention of Him from many arenas of public life, legalized gay marriages in far too many states, and accomplished the abortion of tens of millions of unborn babies.

Further, he is increasingly managing to take away parents’ rights over their children. As a case in point, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced May 1, 2013, that the “morning after” pill known as Plan B (which induces spontaneous abortion) should be available without a prescription for teenagers starting at age 15. The teens do not have to get parental permission.

All-out warfare is under way to destroy the family, which God ordained at the beginning of creation.

Our Creator God established the family

The Bible shows that God established the family back in the Garden of Eden. The first two chapters of Genesis present God’s awesome work as Creator. He formed and fashioned our planet, filled the oceans, created mountains and planted forests with an exquisite variety of life. His variety of creatures such as hummingbirds, whales and wallabies shows the vastness of His mind.

And He created all of that for His ultimate physical creation, a man and woman united as husband and wife in a loving family, to live in and take care of (Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18, 20-24).

God created the family, which comprises both marriage and parenthood. These two elements reveal God’s character and His perfect plan for mankind. The love between a husband and wife provides a glimpse of Christ’s passionate devotion to us as His Bride, the Church (to learn more, be sure to

read “The Ultimate Purpose of Marriage” beginning on page 8 of this issue).

In Matthew 19:4-6 Jesus Christ said: “Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

God is our ultimate Parent, and we are His human offspring. Human parents experiencing the ups and downs of parenthood provide an example to us of God’s tenderness and patience toward us as His children.

Families are close to God’s heart. When God created man, He said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Genesis 2:18). After creating this first man and woman, “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Genesis 1:28).

Our human families exist to teach us about the family of God and His plan for mankind—that we must be born into His family.

All-out warfare is under way to destroy the family, which God ordained at the beginning of creation.

And Satan knew this. So Satan, in his first attempt to destroy God’s plan by destroying the family, presented himself to Eve in the Garden of Eden. Satan was able to deceive Eve. We too can fall prey to Satan if we aren’t careful, as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:3: “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”

Who will win the war over you and your family?

We are in an epic spiritual war. In this war it is critically important that we know Satan’s tactics. To be ignorant of his schemes and plans of attack is to give him the advantage in your life.

In Ephesians 4:27 we are commanded to “not make room for the devil” (NRSV). When you make room for the enemy by living in sin, whether by omission or commission, you have exposed yourself to Satan. And in most cases he will take that opportunity to rush in and crush you and your

family! The apostle Paul described what happens when people do “make room for the devil” and let him deceive them (often unwittingly) into accepting his perverted values and twisted thinking.

Notice what Paul wrote in Romans 1:18-32 (NIV): “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For 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, so that people are without excuse.

“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of

God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

“Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

“Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.

“Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.”

Notice some of the terms that Paul, writing under divine inspiration, used: depravity (homosexual marriage, anyone?), murder (what about abortions in the millions?) deceit (such as “parent one” and “parent two”). Yes, there is indeed a war on the family—one foretold in Scripture 2,000 years ago. It’s the natural outgrowth of people rejecting God and having the arrogance to think we know better.

A promise of hope

But there is hope. God’s promise from 2 Chronicles 7:14 holds true today: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

We must not get caught up in this world’s ungodly values and be swayed by the popular music, TV, movies and anything else bent on destroying the family unit and God’s truth. We must teach our children about God and the Bible, because the schools certainly will not. We must work hard to preserve the family unit as God intended.

In spite of what government says, there is no “parent one” and “parent two,” which is a biological fiction on its face. Instead, there is a mother and father as God intended it. He is our Father and not parent one, and His Church nourishes us as a mother, not parent two.

That is what the human family represents. God has a beautiful plan for all of mankind, and it starts with the family unit, what is known as the traditional family. Satan, though he is trying, will not succeed in destroying the family. For God’s family will prevail! **GN**

Learn More

Is Satan the devil a real being? If so, how does he operate? What are his goals and desires? Does he affect your life, and if so, how? You need to learn what the Bible says in our free booklet *Is There Really a Devil?* Download or request your free copy today!



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In announcing government investment in continued research into mapping the human brain, U.S. President Barack Obama rightly stated: “You know, as humans, we can identify galaxies light years away, we can study particles smaller than an atom. *But we still haven’t unlocked the mystery of the three pounds of matter that sits between our ears*” (introducing the BRAIN Initiative, April 2, 2013).

The neuron is the brain’s basic building block. Billions of neurons joined together by trillions of complex neural connections compose the body’s most intricate organ. But is a central aspect of the human mind and brain beyond the understanding of even neuroscientists?

One of the main purposes of this mapping project would be to better treat, cure and even prevent serious brain disorders like epilepsy and Alzheimer’s disease.

Apparently new technologies will be employed such as the manipulation of brain activity with light. Scientists have speculated about the great hopes of even unexpected successes. As *The Economist* put it: “If the project’s researchers get really lucky, *they might stumble across the secret of consciousness* and thus answer one of the biggest questions of all” (“America’s Neuroscience Initiative: Mind-Expanding,” April 2, 2013, emphasis added throughout).

So one ultimate aim has to remain the potential discovery of just how the brain itself generates our conscious human minds—if indeed it really does. Many scientists now believe that some 15 billion years of cosmic evolution transformed matter into consciousness. But is that how it truly happened?

Fifteen of America’s most capable neuroscientists have been assembled to initiate the project. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) will lead several other respected scientific bodies to work out goals and milestones—indicating the importance of finding solutions to major health issues continually confronting the American public.

Where do we find solutions?

Although they don’t realize it, many Americans, Canadians, Britons, Australians and Germans—peoples of many nations—already have a book of ultimate solutions in their homes. Even the Republic of China is not only publishing Bibles, but exporting them to other countries.

The very book that most members of the intelligentsia neglect to consult actually

MAPPING THE BRAIN: The Missing Dimension

U.S. President Barack Obama recently announced plans to spend millions on mapping the human brain—labeled “the next great American project”—perhaps on a par with going to the moon. But is there a largely unrealized component residing in the brain itself that cannot be studied or mapped by neuroscientists? What does the Bible reveal about the mystery of the human mind? *by John Ross Schroeder*



has workable solutions to mysteries and problems that have long puzzled and eluded mankind.

If we truly believe that God is our Creator, we accept that surely He knows just how we were put together and how to make our lives work well. King David of Israel said to God in Psalm 139:14-16: “I will praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made . . . My frame was not hidden

from You, when I was made in secret . . . Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.”

Only our Creator can reveal lasting solutions to mysterious human problems that intrigue, puzzle and even frustrate us. (We offer several free booklets to help you have more confidence in God as your Creator and the Bible as His authentic holy Word to mankind. Download or request *Life’s*

Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?, Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe? and Is the Bible True?

Human mind = human brain + human spirit

The word *brain* is not found in the Bible. Yet God's Word has plenty to say about the human mind and heart. Our brains and our



minds are very closely related. Scripture also describes what will inevitably happen to us if we persist in neglecting to submit our minds and hearts to our loving Creator and His Word, following instead the evil imaginations and desires of our hearts (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

The Bible tells us in the early chapters of Genesis that we were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1-2; 9:6). So logically every human being has enormous potential if he or she would only seek our Creator in prayer and ask Him to redirect our paths into conformity with His righteous way of life.

The missing dimension in understanding the human brain can be summed up in just one word, and that word is *spirit*. The Bible tells us that a human spirit exists in every human being. It is this spirit essence that gives us human consciousness, self-awareness and understanding. As God tells us in Job 32:8, "There is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding."

Animals have brains—in some cases much larger than ours—but the gulf between human and animal capability is vast. What do we have that they don't?

The Spirit in Man Is Not an Immortal Soul

As explained in the main article, the human spirit (or spirit in man) imparts human intellect to our physical brains. It is by far the main factor in making people vastly more intelligent than animals. Yet this spiritual aspect of human existence is nothing like the immortal soul concept widely introduced into Western philosophy by the adoption of teachings of ancient Greek mythmakers.

The spirit in man is not animate of itself. It is not a spirit entity that consciously lives on when we die. As a number of scriptural passages show, this human spirit has no consciousness after death (see Psalm 6:5; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10). We have no awareness of anything at all after we die. Then at a future time in the resurrection, God will place our individual spirits within new bodies, restoring us back to conscious life.

The first resurrection to eternal spirit life,

comprehensively described in 1 Corinthians 15, is that of truly converted Christians at the second coming of Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; Philippians 3:20-21). Then a thousand years later, a second resurrection happens to those who never really knew or heard of Jesus Christ or had no real opportunity for spiritual conversion during their lifetimes. It will be a wonderful opportunity to obtain everlasting life in God's Kingdom, joining those who are already in God's spirit-composed family.

To understand these matters in much more biblical detail, request or download our free booklets *What Happens After Death?* and *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* The error of the immortal soul concept—and the fact that the "soul" can and does die (Ezekiel 18:4, 20)—is covered in both publications.

When God created the first man Adam, He "breathed into His nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). Apparently this is the moment when the spirit in man first entered into the first human being. Zechariah 12:1 elaborates, "Thus says the LORD, who stretched out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him."

How is it that human beings are conscious of their environment and can learn material knowledge of all kinds? The apostle Paul replies: "For what man knows the things of a man except [by] the spirit of the man which is in him?" (1 Corinthians 2:11).

Because of this spirit in human beings, we are fundamentally different from the animal world. Animals have brains—in some cases much larger than ours—but the gulf between human and animal capability is vast. This spirit in man combines with our brain to give us what we commonly call the *mind*—and with that the ability to think, plan, create, plan for the future, learn from the past and ponder the great questions about our existence.

The spirit in man is not independently conscious

The human spirit is not some independent consciousness to be equated with what many have come to term an immortal soul. The Bible teaches that there is no consciousness in death (see "The Spirit in Man Is Not an Immortal Soul").

So what happens to the spirit in man when we die? King Solomon mused on this question in Ecclesiastes 3:21: "Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward [at death]?" But he answers the mystery in the concluding chapter: "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

During Jesus Christ's last moments of human consciousness, just before taking His final breath, He said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 22:46). The spirit leaves a human being when he or she dies, and it goes back to God who gave it.

But again, it is by no means then a disembodied consciousness. Rather, it is a record of our makeup and thoughts that God will use to enliven us anew in the future resurrection from the dead. (Imagine a running computer program that is shut down when the computer is turned off—and then transferring that program to another machine



with a new operating system and reactivating the program with the data intact.)

But this is very far from the whole story. We return to 1 Corinthians 2 to connect the dots and fill in more of this marvelous picture. The spirit of man impacts conversion and salvation, the overall purpose of life and the whole plan of God for humanity.

The Holy Spirit and the spirit in man

In the verse previously quoted from Paul about the spirit in man, 1 Corinthians 2:11, he continues, “Even so no one knows the things of God except [by] the spirit of God.” Without the Holy Spirit, people’s understanding of spiritual truths remains very limited. Capable men have written whole commentaries about the Bible and yet still lacked real comprehension of spiritual truths obvious to converted people who possess the Holy Spirit.

In the next verse, Paul goes on to say, “Now we [Christians] have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (verse 12, King James Version). The precious spiritual knowledge of our Creator cannot come to us unless He reveals it by His Holy Spirit.

Continuing in the same context: “These [spiritual] things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (verse 13). Material knowledge emerges from the possession of the spirit in man. But spiritual knowledge that ultimately results in salvation and everlasting life can only come during this age of man if God the Father chooses to call us (John 6:44, 65).

Why are there so many atheists, agnostics and unbelieving secularists ignorant of God and His purpose and plan for human existence? Paul next states in 1 Corinthians 2, “*But the natural man does not receive the things of the spirit of God*, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (verse 14).

Paul expresses this basic principle in another way elsewhere in Romans 8:6-7: “For to be carnally [fleshly or naturally] minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”

The expected result: “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His” (verse 9). All truly converted Chris-

tians have the Holy Spirit. But how do we receive it?

The Holy Spirit combines with the spirit in man

Normally several things must happen *before* we can receive the Holy Spirit. First God the Father must select us for salvation as one of His firstfruits (James 1:18)—God’s converted people over the entire span of human history until Christ’s return. As part of calling us (John 6:44), God reveals saving spiritual knowledge and leads us to repentance and even to having faith (Romans 2:4; Hebrews 11:6). After

Should we not also study and research into the subject of salvation and our future as a worthy project during our entire lives as Christians?

that we must be baptized, and then we will receive the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands of Christ’s ministry (Acts 2:37-39; 3:19; 8:12, 15-17).

But how does the spirit in man fit into this overall scenario? Paul tells us in Romans 8:16: “The [Holy] Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit [the spirit in man], that we are the children of God” (KJV). Apparently at the moment when we are first converted, *the Holy Spirit merges with the spirit in man within us*.

By physical analogy, this occurrence is not unlike what happens at human conception. A male sperm merges with a female egg to form a new human being. As one science book put it: “Human life begins in . . . cooperation of the most intimate sort. The two cells wholly merge. They combine their genetic material. Two very different beings become one. The act of making a human being involves . . . cooperation so perfect that the partners’ separate identities vanish” (Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan, *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, 1992, p. 199).

How wonderful are the ways of God!

Summing up

For many decades neuroscientists have diligently studied the complex wiring of the human brain. This cumulative knowledge has grown many times over and been documented by many books and research papers on the subject.

Man was made in the image of God, and there seems to be no material knowledge that can be withheld from him. Our Creator remarked on man’s knowledge potential at the ancient Tower of Babel: “This is what

they begin to do; now nothing that they propose [or *imagine*] to do will be withheld from them” (Genesis 11:6).

Our examination here is in no way intended to denigrate mankind’s true scientific knowledge about the human brain, nor his further research into its marvelous workings. The book of Daniel foretold that one of the characteristics of the time of the end, the period leading up to Christ’s return, would be that knowledge would markedly increase (Daniel 12:4), and this is certainly true of our age.

But what about God’s awesome plan and

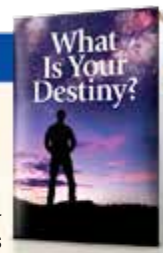
purpose for human beings? Should we not also study and research into the subject of salvation and our future as a worthy project during our entire lives as Christians?

Does God have a way of continuing life after death into a glorious paradise? Jesus Christ and His apostles guarantee that everlasting life in the Kingdom of God will definitely happen (John 5:24-29; 1 Corinthians 15:22-23)—but only if we individually choose to meet the spiritual conditions God sets for us.

Returning to 1 Corinthians 2, we find Paul speaking in verses 9-10 of the glimpse God gives us through His Holy Spirit of the awesome future He has planned for us: “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, or ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. *But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit*. For the spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.’” **GN**

Learn More

What sets mankind apart from the rest of God’s creation? To better understand the whole purpose and plan of God for humanity, download or request our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?* Our Creator’s glorious purpose remains well beyond our wildest dreams. Men and women were created to share dominion with God over the entire created universe!



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GOD, Science & the Bible

More to Consider About **the Ant**

Consider the ant, Solomon urged, and learn wisdom from her ways (Proverbs 6:6).

Most of us consider the ant to be a pest—an unwelcome nuisance that disrupts our picnic or invades our kitchen. But there is so much to consider about this tiny insect.

Vivid contrast to laziness

What did Solomon admire about the ant? “It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest” (verses 7-8, New International Version). Solomon challenged a “ sluggard”—a habitually lazy person—to learn from how these energetic, industrious, relentless little creatures do their work without being told.

Solomon decries the way a sluggard sleeps too much and at the wrong time (verses 10-11). His motto: “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep . . .” When the alarm sounds, his rested hand is practiced at unfolding and hitting the snooze button! When day is done, he has nothing done.

He procrastinates so habitually that he becomes a pro at it. When life’s opportunities are presented to him like they are to others who make good choices and succeed, he fritters them away. Solomon warns that this leads to poverty, and the real danger is spiritual poverty.

Yet there are further observations to make.

The worker or the egg?—defying evolution

Though the anthill has a queen and can’t survive without her, her only function is to lay eggs. In one study of an actual leaf-cutter ant colony—as reported in the 2013 BBC documentary *Planet Ant: Life Inside the Colony*—it was calculated that the queen laid about 30,000 eggs.

Myrmecologists (ant experts) say all the eggs are exactly the same. Yet, remarkably, *how much food* a worker ant feeds each egg determines whether the generic egg becomes another worker ant, a soldier ant or a queen! Think about the enormity of that—what’s in that food?

More food to make a bigger ant is understandable. But how does more of the same food create ants with different functions? Not surprisingly, the film gives no explanation for this.

Can you even dream up a theory about how that could have evolved? Why would the first worker ant “think” it should go up and feed an egg a certain way?

How would evolution luckily create just the right mix of ant types for a balanced, functioning ant colony—every time?

And the real question is, like the famous chicken-and-egg conundrum, where did the first worker ant come from that was needed to feed an egg so that it could grow into the first worker ant?

As with all of God’s wondrous creation, all unique



features and parts had to work perfectly the first time or the ant colony would not have survived, let alone prospered. Though the film makes casual references to evolution, it states with a measure of awe, “There is nothing haphazard about this project.” How true!

Extraordinary load bearing

The leaf-cutter ants do not cut leaves the way naturalists expect. They don’t wield their mandibles like a pair of scissors. Instead, they anchor a leaf with one mandible and then drop the other rapidly like a guillotine!

The leaf-cutter ants also anchor with their back legs, and the result is the bigger the ant, the bigger an arc it can cut in the leaf. The film calls this “a really nice mechanism to make sure the bigger ants carry bigger loads.”

And while ants certainly don’t look like all that strong, each worker ant can carry up to four times its weight for as far as a kilometer—the equivalent of hundreds of miles for a human being. Some sources claim an ant can lift 20 times its own body weight!

How does that compare with what the strongest human beings can lift? The current official record for the clean and jerk in the men’s 105+ kg class is held by Hossein Reza Zadeh of Iran—580 pounds (263 kg) at the 2004 Athens Summer Olympics. In the women’s 75+ kg class at the same Olympics, Gonghong Tang of China lifted 402 pounds (182.5 kg). That’s about 2½ times their weight.

These human accomplishments came about through rigorous training, diet and determination, not blind chance. And they come nowhere close to matching an ordinary ant!

Can ants predict earthquakes?

In one remarkable study, red wood ants living along active faults in Germany were found to change their behavior the day before an earthquake (of magnitude 2 or greater). Instead of collecting food in the day and resting at night, they stayed active all night. The day after the quake, they returned to normal.

These startling findings were presented April 11, 2013, by Gabriele Berberich of the University Duisburg-Essen in Germany at the European Geosciences Union annual meeting in Vienna, Austria. Using a special camera and software, Berberich and her colleagues tracked the ants for three years from 2009 through 2012. During this period 10 earthquakes between 2.0 and 3.2 occurred.

How do the ants sense an earthquake coming? Berberich believes they are either registering changing gas emissions with special cells called chemoreceptors or reacting to tiny changes in the earth’s magnetic field with their magnetoreceptors.

This is the first time it has been reported that ants react to future earthquakes. Berberich plans to conduct similar research in areas prone to more and bigger earthquakes—with the potential of saving many lives.

Copying ant efficiencies in technology

In 2006, researchers at the University of Bristol, England, spent countless hours analyzing *Temnothorax albipennis* ants searching for food. They found that both leader ants and followers appeared to work in tandem and provide bidirectional feedback.

Though a leader ant could race to the food four times faster on its own, it would work with a follower ant, teaching it how to find the food and remember its location. The teaching ant seemed to adapt its pace according to the follower’s ability to keep up. Since ant colonies seem to function in flawless communication, researchers are analyzing what we should copy from their example.

Today’s technologically driven world is considering the ant for clues about solving technical problems.

Consider the ants’ ability to quickly determine the most efficient path to food and to bringing it back to the colony. Stated simply, an ant comes to a fork in the path. If food is found going left, the ant leaves a scent on the path. If no food is found on the right, the ant comes back and leaves no scent. At the junction the rest of the ants follow the scent left and reinforce it.

Recognizing such success, a nationwide company considers the ants’ methods to determine the best sequence of deliveries to its warehouses. Experts focused on travel in outer space are considering such determination in slinging spacecraft from one planet to another by gravity for maximum energy efficiency.

These are some of the remarkable discoveries researchers are making about ants. Indeed, as Solomon advised, we have much to learn from them! For more than 3,000 years, wise men and women have found that it’s worth our time to ponder this amazing part of God’s creation!

—Robert Curry

Ground Zero Jerusalem

The conflict between Israelis and Arabs is profoundly affecting your daily life. As world history heads towards a crisis point at Ground Zero Jerusalem, what should our focus be? *by Beyond Today host Gary Petty*

For years one American husband and wife have fought the United States government over their son's passport. Their son was born in Jerusalem. The parents argue that the boy's birthplace should be listed as Israel. Instead, the passport lists his place of birth as Jerusalem—a city rather than a country.

A report in *USA Today* explains the situation: "Since the 1948 creation of the state of Israel, the U.S. government has declined to recognize any country as having sovereignty over Jerusalem. State Department policy dictates that the passports of children of American citizens born in Jerusalem say only 'Jerusalem' for place of birth (Joan Biskupic, "Top Court Examines Birthplace Case," Nov. 8, 2011).

In the 1967 Six-Day War, Israeli soldiers stormed the gates of the ancient city of Jerusalem. Standing before the massive wall of the Temple Mount, they claimed a birthright given to them by God.

But Arab Muslims claim the same area. Adorned with sacred Islamic sites, they consider it a birthright given to them by God. Both peoples assert ancient rights to ownership.

So the U.S. State Department, Congress, Justice Department and President all debate: Who are the citizens of Jerusalem? Israelis? Palestinians? Jerusalemites?

The biblical prophet Ezekiel wrote, "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her'" (Ezekiel 5:5).

The ancient city of Jerusalem possesses little in the way of economic or military value. Still, it's been such a focal point of history that at times it's been called the center of the world. It's considered holy by the three major monotheistic religions—

Judaism, Islam and Christianity. And it's certainly been the epicenter for centuries of religious strife and bloodshed.

Even in our global society, what happens in the Middle East seems far off and unrelated to our daily lives. The fact is that what happens in Jerusalem makes a big difference in your life.

The violent clashes between Israeli



The denial of the historical Temple is widespread among Muslims. Why is it so important for them to discredit the existence of Solomon's temple on the Temple Mount?

soldiers and rock-throwing Arab youths, American soldiers dying in Afghanistan, the Western world's dependence on Arab oil, the fear of Islamic terrorism seen every time you have to be searched at an airport—these are all links in a chain binding you to the religious and political strife in the Middle East.

And at the heart of this conflict is a small plot of land in Jerusalem called the Temple

Mount. What is the historical significance of this place? What will the future bring here, and what does this have to do with us?

Rewriting history

Today the top of the Temple Mount, dominated by the famous Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, is under Islamic control. Historically, it is also the site where King Herod's temple, visited by Jesus, was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. According to the Bible, around 1000 B.C., Israel's King David reigned from Jerusalem. On this plot of land his son Solomon constructed a magnificent temple to God.

These facts are taught in secular history classes in the United States, Canada and Europe. Solomon's temple is an essential element of biblical history. But this history is being rewritten by various Islamic leaders.

In July 2000 the U.S. and Israeli delegations to the second Camp David accord were shocked when Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat declared that the



Temple Mount was not the site of Solomon's temple. According to Arafat the entire history of the Temple was a Jewish fabrication. Since that time more and more Islamic leaders have argued that Solomon never constructed a temple in Jerusalem.

In a 2009 *Wall Street Journal* story it was reported that the chief Islamic judge of the Palestinian Authority claimed that Solomon's temple "has no historical roots." He added that the Jews are engaging in "an attack on history, theft of culture, falsification of facts, erasure of the truth, and Judaization of the place."

The same article noted that this Islamic rewriting of history is "echoed in Palestinian primary-school textbooks, preached at mosques, and printed in official newspapers" ("Palestinian Leaders Deny Jerusalem's Past, Sept. 25, 2009).

The denial of the historical Temple is widespread among Muslims. Why is it so important for them to discredit the existence of Solomon's temple on the Temple Mount?

The biblical account of Solomon's temple presents Islamic clerics with a difficult problem. If Solomon's temple existed, then great weight must be given to the historical accuracy of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament. They proclaim that God's blessing to Abraham was passed to Isaac and Jacob and to their descendants, the people of Israel. This is in direct contradiction to the Koran's teaching that the blessing was passed from Abraham to Ishmael and his descendants, the Arab people.

The Bible describes Solomon's temple as a beautiful and magnificent building. Rising above the rest of the city, it served as the place for the daily worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

It contained an inner room called the Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place, which housed the Ark of the Covenant containing the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments.

The Bible states that when Solomon finished his prayer of dedication, fire came from heaven and consumed the sacrifice he had prepared, and God's presence filled the temple.

The reason this history is unacceptable to Islamic leaders is because it flies in the face of their view of how God works in history. To support that worldview, one must rewrite history not only to erase the existence of Solomon's temple, but to expunge any trace of Jewish presence in Jerusalem's past.

Jerusalem and the Messiah

There's another reason why Palestinian clerics wish to discredit Jewish claims to the Temple Mount. It's because biblical prophecies foretell that God's Messiah will reign from Jerusalem.

The prophet Isaiah wrote: "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on 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 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" (Isaiah 2:2-3).

Ancient Hebrew prophets didn't just foretell a future Messiah. They also foretold a prominent place for the Jewish people in the Messiah's reign from Jerusalem.

The prophet Zechariah wrote: "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities; the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, 'Let us continue to go and pray before the LORD, and seek the LORD of hosts. I myself will go also.' Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD'" (Zechariah 8:20-22).

Then notice the next verse: "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'" (verse 23).

The goal of Islamic leaders in rewriting history is to discredit the Bible. That way they can dispel all Jewish claims to the ancient land of Israel. Even more, they can discredit the prophecies of God's Messiah who will rule from Jerusalem.

For those of us who believe the Bible is the Word of the living God, this attempt to discredit the Bible is nothing less than an attempt to defy and discredit the God revealed in the Bible. This is why Christians are inevitably drawn into the strife surrounding a few acres of land in a faraway and ancient city.

Desire to build a new temple

Today no temple dedicated to the God of Israel exists on the Temple Mount. However, there are both Jews and Christians who are dedicated to rebuilding the temple.

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They believe that Bible prophecy foretells a future temple when Jerusalem becomes ground zero of biblical prophecy.

We are told by the first-century historian Josephus that when the Roman army sacked Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Jewish temple caught fire and burned. Titus, the Roman conqueror, erected an arch as a memorial to his victory. That arch still stands in Rome to this day. It's adorned with carved scenes depicting Roman soldiers carting off various items from the temple in Jerusalem, including the large golden menorah, silver trumpets and the table of showbread. The Arch of Titus stands as one of the great proofs of the existence of Jerusalem's temple.

Since the time of Josephus and Titus, many Jews have longed and prayed for the reconstruction of the temple. Some devout Jews turn to Exodus 25:8 and cite God's instructions to Moses: "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them."

The intense emotions created by the concept of a rebuilt temple were seen in October 2011 during a Jewish prayer service at the Western Wall of the Temple Mount. Rabbi Eliyahu offered this prayer as recorded by Israeli news sources: "We are lifting our voices to God. We are shouting out to him like a baby shouting out to his father. When a baby cries, his father understands him. His mother understands him. This is how we shout out to God. Without talking. We pray to God that the prayer will not just take place here at the Kotel (Western Wall) but in the actual Holy Temple, on the Temple Mount. May it be rebuilt quickly and in our time."

One of the organizations committed to the rebuilding of the temple is the Temple Institute. This Jerusalem-based group states that the rebuilding of the temple is a biblical command. They have recreated many sacred vessels plus the golden menorah, the altar of incense and special clothing worn by the high priest in anticipation of reinstating sacred temple services.

Of course, there are many obstacles to building a temple, not the least being the fact that the Temple Mount is under Islamic control. There is also debate among Jewish scholars as to the exact location of the Most Holy Place and whether the temple is to be built before or after the Messiah's coming.

Controversy to intensify

To understand how this small patch of land becomes ground zero of biblical prophecy, we go to the writings of the prophet Daniel. In Daniel 12 we find a prophecy

of "the time of the end," which speaks of a great resurrection of the dead. We can couple Daniel's prophecy with Revelation 20, which refers to Christ's return and the resurrection of His followers.

There's a vital connection to the exact timing of Daniel's prophecy. Daniel is writing of the time when the Messiah is sent to rule from Jerusalem. He also refers to



Today's enormous temple platform that dominates Jerusalem is the base of the gigantic temple complex built by the biblical king Herod the Great—yet Muslims deny any past Jewish presence there.

a time before the coming of the Messiah when "the daily sacrifice is taken away" (Daniel 12:1-13).

According to the laws given to ancient Israel, the daily sacrifice can only be conducted by authorized Levitical priests at an authorized site for sacrifice such as the temple. So Daniel's prophecy reveals that before the second coming of Jesus Christ, there must be some sort of animal sacrifices taking place in Jerusalem. When international pressure and violence stops those sacrifices, the world enters a time of calamity so great that Jesus Christ must intervene or all humanity will be exterminated (verse 11; Matthew 24:21-22).

This is why it is important for you to stay informed about events unfolding in the Middle East!

The temple God is building

While there are no biblical instructions for Christians to build a physical temple on the Temple Mount, the Bible does tell us of a temple being constructed by God Himself.

The apostle Paul wrote about a group of people being prepared by God as "citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:19-21). God is building a spiritual temple in which *people* are living

stones (2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:4-5).

One purpose of biblical prophecy is to reveal the God of history and prophecy. Discovering the prophecies about restoring the sacrifices in Jerusalem and witnessing the events leading up to the fulfillment of those prophecies should motivate us to turn to God. It's to help us become one of His living stones in His spiritual temple.

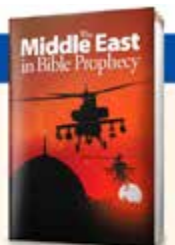
It's time to *turn away* from complacent, secularized Christianity and, in humble repentance and obedience, *turn to* our Creator God and what Jesus actually taught. The gospel is more than a message about the person of Jesus Christ. It is a message of how we are respond to God *through* Jesus Christ.

The controversy over the Temple Mount will continue to intensify. Jewish and Christian desires to rebuild a temple are going to be matched by staunch opposition from the entire Muslim world.

When animal sacrifices are reinstituted in Jerusalem, you will know that biblical prophecy is being fulfilled. But a physical temple isn't God's main focus. Jesus Christ is returning to a spiritual temple built of people who have responded to His call and dedicated their lives to becoming part of it! **GN**

Learn More

Jerusalem has been a center of conflict for centuries—and will be again in the time of the end. What is foretold to happen there? Who will be involved, and why? Are we seeing events shaping up that could lead to that long-foretold outcome? You need to know! Download or request your free copy of *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* today!



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Here's How You Can Be Part of the Greatest Adventure

What motivates you? Does the opportunity for adventure excite you? If so, coming soon is an adventure you won't want to miss. It will pale into insignificance every past exploit or achievement and will completely surpass anything you have ever imagined!

by John LaBissoniere



In my youth I was fascinated by inventors and adventurers. I often read books from the public library about the accomplishments of such notable figures as Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Edmund Hillary and the Wright Brothers.

Available at that time was the *We Were There* series, consisting of 36 historical novels for young people written between 1955 and 1963. These books told inspiring, entertaining stories based on true historic events. Titles included *We Were There With Lewis and Clark*, *We Were There at the First Airplane Flight* and *We Were There*

With Byrd at the South Pole.

While reading this series of books and others, I keenly desired to set off on an exciting adventure. Nevertheless as a boy, my escapades went no farther than my own neighborhood! As I entered my 20s, however, something extraordinary happened. I was introduced to what will be the greatest adventure of all time! I'd like to tell you about it because *you* can participate.

In fact, all people, young and old, rich and poor, from every culture and land can eventually join in. Contemplating this adventure can energize one's mind and heart. It prom-

ises infinite potential beyond the bounds of human imagination. This adventure, brought to us from the very Creator of the universe, will pale into insignificance every past human exploit or achievement!

Nothing can compare to this adventure

Remarkably, human beings, even with their marvelous intelligence and creative ability, cannot begin to imagine what God is preparing for them. The apostle Paul wrote: "What God has planned is more than eyes have seen or ears have heard. It has never even entered our minds" (1 Corinthians 2:9, Contemporary English Version).

Indeed, what God intends seems utterly preposterous to those who have not yet had their minds opened to understand it! "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

To be sure, spiritual insight from God is the critical element in comprehending this coming extraordinary adventure. While human beings concentrate most of their thoughts on temporary, physical concerns and interests, God's thinking revolves around what is spiritual and eternal: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

An awesome future inheritance

Most people have no clue as to their incredible potential. They are completely unaware of the "unseen" (2 Corinthians 4:18 (English Standard Version)). However, our Creator has for now called a small number of people to grasp His spiritual knowledge (1 Corinthians 2:10). Even though He has not revealed every detail to them, they are offered an exhilarating glimpse of a thrilling and supremely productive future (1 Corinthians 13:12). "He who overcomes



shall inherit *all things*, and I will be his God and he shall be My son" (Revelation 21:7, emphasis added throughout).

What did He mean? Will a person literally inherit the billions upon billions of stars? Does "all things" include everything seen and unseen? Absolutely! In the original Greek language the term "*all things*" is derived from the word *panta*, meaning *the totality of the creation* (John 1:3). While human beings presently have dominion over the earth, it is just a tiny precursor to the astounding adventure yet to come (Genesis 1:28; Hebrews 2:6-8).

To all those who love and obey Him, our eternal Father offers the marvelous opportunity to live, create and flourish with Him in His divine family for all eternity (1 Peter 1:4; Romans 6:23). But to experience that future, each person must undergo a dramatic change from mortal life to immortality at the time of the resurrection of the dead (John 10:28; 1 Corinthians 15:50-52). At that very moment those who are God's children will be completely transformed to be like Him (1 John 3:2).

The Eternal God's radiant appearance

What is the Eternal God like? The patriarch Moses wanted to know and said to Him, "Please, show me Your glory" (Exodus 33:18). Because God's appearance is so amazingly radiant He told Moses, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live" (Exodus 33:20). Nevertheless God allowed Moses to see His back, after which Moses' own face glowed so luminously that he had to keep it covered so as not to startle the Israelites (Exodus 33:23; 34:29-35).

In the first chapter of the book of Revelation, the glorified, resurrected Jesus Christ gave the apostle John a look at His form through a vision: "His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were bright like flames of fire. His feet were as bright as bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves . . . and his face was as bright as the sun in all its brilliance" (Revelation 1:14-16, New International Version).

God's faithful saints will take on His appearance when they are granted everlasting life at the resurrection of the dead (Colossians 1:12; Daniel 12:2). Jesus Christ "will transform our lowly body *that it may be conformed to His glorious body*" (Philippians 3:21). For those given this fabulous, new spiritual existence, death, sorrow, crying and pain will forever be a thing of the



Upon being changed into glorious beings, God's children will not then go away to live in heaven in a passive, uneventful future. Rather, they will be actively leading and aiding human beings here on the earth.

past (Revelation 21:4). Just how wonderful and gratifying will this eternal spiritual life be? King David described it as enjoying "pleasures forevermore" (Psalms 16:11).

Amazing abilities and opportunities

Each new spirit being will be given awesome capabilities. Imagine, for example, having the ability to walk through solid objects or materialize out of nowhere as Christ did when He appeared to His disciples after His resurrection (Matthew 24:13-43). Envision being able to travel swiftly throughout the universe at what could be called the speed of thought (John 20:11-19). Imagine having the capacity to know and recite the names of each of the billions of stars in the universe (Psalm 147:4-5).

Besides having these aptitudes, the new immortal beings will be accomplishing wonderful, creative work and service just as God does. Jesus said, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). Upon being changed into glorious beings, God's children will not then go away to live in heaven in a passive, uneventful future. Rather, they will be actively leading and aiding human beings here on the earth. As angels proclaim to

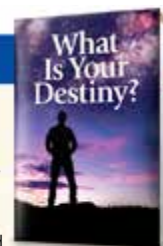
God about those who are saved, "You have made them a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and *they shall rule on earth*" (Revelation 5:10, Today's English Version).

Priests are leaders and teachers. Along with Christ they will wisely instruct people in God's way of life and administer His laws for 1,000 years (Isaiah 30:20-21; Revelation 20:6). They will work to establish and preserve righteousness, peace and prosperity throughout the world (Romans 8:21). Even then, the adventure is just beginning, as we inherit the entire universe.

So, the greatest adventure of all time

Learn More

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awaits all those who deeply love, honor and obey God.

Preparing is an adventure in itself

This brings us to some crucial questions. How can *you* participate in what God is planning?

What can *you* do to share in His unparalleled opportunities to serve, grow and create?

Actually, preparing for this coming great adventure is an adventure in itself. Any meaningful human endeavor requires good planning and vigorous effort. And the same goes for readying yourself to serve with Christ in His coming government.

It all begins with God's calling, which only the Father can initiate (John 6:44). On His invitation, He begins lifting the veil of deception that has formerly prevented you from grasping His true spiritual knowledge



(Ephesians 1:18). After God opens your mind to comprehend His truth, you are faced with a choice. Either you can continue pursuing your old, sinful ways, or you can respond to Him through repentance of your sins and obedience to His commandments (1 Peter 1:22; Psalm 119:172).

After repentance—turning your life around to seek God above all else—you are then baptized. In doing so you fully accept Jesus Christ as your Savior while recognizing that it is only through His life, death and resurrection that you have spiritual deliverance (Acts 4:12; Philippians 2:9-11).

After baptism you immediately receive God's remarkable gift of the Holy Spirit

through the laying on of hands by His ministry (1 Timothy 4:4). Then, through the power of the Holy Spirit, you strive to "live by every word of God" and stay close to your Sustainer through diligent prayer (Luke 4:4; Philippians 4:6). Your aim is to completely follow Jesus' example of love toward God and others (Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:5).

This process of spiritual transformation begins preparing you for the coming supreme adventure of everlasting life and service in the Kingdom of God. This goal should motivate you far beyond any endeavor you might find exciting or attractive in this physical life!

Face the challenges and keep on toward the goal

Of course, before embarking on this new spiritual journey you will need to carefully "count the cost" since there will be difficulties and challenges ahead (Luke 14:28-33; Ephesians 6:12).

You must never forget that, at least for the time being, the entire world is trapped in a colossal, satanic deception from which you have been freed through God's grace (1 John 5:19; Revelation 12:9; Ephesians 2:1-10). Each day you will need to "put on the whole armor of God" and live by faith in order "to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one" (Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 6:11, 16).

Through God's powerful help you will need to focus your mind and heart significantly more on His interests and much less on your own (Psalm 121:1-2; Matthew 6:25; 16:23). Although you currently have important physical responsibilities, including family, school or work, these must never supersede your immensely greater mission to "seek *first* the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

The goal of participating in the coming great adventure in God's Kingdom, with its splendid rewards and opportunities, must fill you completely (2 Timothy 4:17). This will help us to endure. "Since we are [God's] children, we will share his treasures—for *everything God gives to his Son, Christ, is ours, too*. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. Yet what we suffer now is nothing *compared to the glory he will give us later*" (Romans 8:17-18, New Living Translation, 1996).

So the greatest adventure of all time is coming! I'm preparing to participate. Will you join me? **GN**



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What Did God Plan “Before Time Began”?

It's difficult for us to comprehend the concept of “before time began,” much less what took place then. But Scripture reveals that God laid out His amazing purpose and plan for mankind before time began!

by Mario Seiglie

Time—it's an integral part of our lives, whether we are young or old. Every day is like a grain of sand falling irretrievably from the hourglass of time.

Until the last century, scientists believed time was eternal and absolute. And why not? After all, everything around us is governed by time—from the mighty sun to the tiniest cell—all have a beginning and an end.

In fact, Isaac Newton (1642-1727), the famous discoverer of gravity, believed time was eternal. It was only during the 20th century that Einstein's theory of relativity and the detection of cosmic background radiation, among other findings, indicated time actually had a beginning and was woven into the very fabric of space.

Moreover, all the known ancient religious books except for the Bible describe time as

being eternal. Only the Bible boldly claims there was a moment when time, as we know it, *did not exist*. Remarkably, it mentions this concept in several places!

As the astrophysicist Hugh Ross points out: “Because humans are trapped in time, where time is linear and cannot be halted or reversed, the idea that anything could exist ‘before’ time defies imagination. Yet, both the Old and New Testaments, *uniquely among pre-modern texts*, refer to God's activities ‘before the beginning of time’ (see for example Proverbs 8:22-23; John 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 2:7; and 2 Timothy 1:9) . . . [The universe] must have arisen from a ‘realm’ or ‘entity’ beyond space and time” (*Why the Universe Is the Way It Is*, 2008, pp. 128-130, emphasis added throughout unless otherwise noted).

Biblically speaking, God “inhabits eternity” (Isaiah 57:15)—in other words, it

is His dwelling place from where He can intervene at will in the universe (Isaiah 46:10).

Moreover, the Bible reveals that not only has God always existed, but that He made great plans “before time began.” Remarkably, it points out three major facets of His plan for mankind that He determined prior to the creation of the universe. Let's take a look at these, which all overlap in large degree.

God's offer to people of eternal life in His divine family

The Bible speaks of “*the hope of eternal life* which God, who cannot lie, *promised before time began*” (Titus 1:2).

This is the reason you and I were created—to have an unending relationship with God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and all those whom They would eventually bring to a glorified state (Hebrews 2:10).

Having the characteristic of love as Their prevailing attribute (1 John 4:8), God the Father and Christ want to share this godly bond with us throughout eternity.

As 1 John 3:1-2 says: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed

on us, that we should be called children of God! . . . Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, *we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is.”

Eternal life means we will no longer be constrained by time. All of us have a beginning, but if we are faithful to God, we are promised a resurrection to an everlasting life in a glorious spirit body. What greater goal could we have than achieving that?

God's provision of grace—His undeserved favor, including forgiveness and help through Christ

The grace of God, His undeserved favor toward us, is also something that was planned before time began. This would involve calling people, leading them to repentance and forgiving all those who would accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for their sins, turn from an ungodly lifestyle and commit to obeying God's holy laws. And it would further involve help to continue in obedience, great blessings in this life and future reward in God's Kingdom.

As 2 Timothy 1:8-9 says, “God . . . has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and *grace* which

given of our sins. Before we even existed, God the Father and the Word who became Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14) were in Their awesome love willing to pay the ultimate price—to have Jesus, beloved Son of the Father, sacrificed in suffering and death as a substitute for our sins.

This is why Scripture says: “And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear, knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed *was foreordained before the foundation of the world*, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Peter 1:18-20).

The mystery God's Church proclaims—God's plan of salvation

God has not planned the universe and our existence in a haphazard way. Instead, He carefully designed everything down to the slightest detail (Matthew 10:30) and has revealed much about His marvelous plan through His prophets and apostles.

As the apostle Paul wrote, “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained *before the ages* for our glory” (1 Corinthians 2:7).

make a dwelling place in us (John 14:23).

The fourth step is the Feast of Trumpets, which marks the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth, this time to reign as King of Kings over all nations. The fifth stage is the Day of Atonement, when Satan will be removed from being able to deceive mankind, and the world at large will be led to repentance. The sixth step is the Feast of Tabernacles, symbolizing the thousand-year rule of Jesus Christ over the entire earth.

Finally, the seventh stage of this plan of salvation is the last feast—the Eighth Day, also sometimes referred to as the Last Great Day. This marks the opportunity of salvation for all human beings, then resurrected, who were not called during their former lives and had not become incorrigibly wicked. They will then have a chance to be called and accept Jesus Christ's sacrifice for their sins.

God is not a respecter of persons, and this vast multitude of human beings can at last have the “veil” of deception removed which kept them blinded from God's spiritual truths during their lifetime in this age (Isaiah 25:7). They will then have God's Holy Spirit and finally understand and keep God's precious laws that pave the way for true salvation.

So we see that these three overlapping aspects of God's plan were laid out before the universe came into existence—before the cosmic time clock was wound up and started ticking away.

God's gift of eternal life, His grace and the hidden brilliance and wisdom of His plan for the salvation of mankind were established prior to creation for all of us to one day choose and enjoy. Will we decide to accept them? We can—and nothing is more important! At *The Good News*, we're committed to serving you in reaching that goal! **GN**

The Bible reveals that not only has God always existed, but that He made great plans “before time began.” It points out three major facets of His plan for mankind that He determined prior to the creation of the universe.

was given to us in Christ Jesus *before time began*” (2 Timothy 1:9).

God would create human beings with free will—giving them freedom to choose what to do with their lives. This meant they could choose to sin, which brings misery. Yet God predetermined a plan to deal with that problem. The unrepentant would ultimately receive death, while those who repented would through God's grace receive help and eternal life.

We cannot, on our own, earn the reward of eternal life. It is only through God's grace that we can accomplish it. As the Bible tells us, “The *wages* of sin is *death*, but the *gift* of God is *eternal life* in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Again, God established, prior to the beginning of time, a way for us to be for-

The Bible Knowledge Commentary notes regarding this verse, “At the heart of this wisdom is *the plan of salvation* intended *for our glory*, determined *before time began*” (1983, emphasis in original).

This plan of salvation is outlined by the festivals of God laid out in the Bible, which reveal seven main steps.

It starts with the Passover, which symbolizes Jesus Christ's sacrifice for our sins. The second feast—the Days of Unleavened Bread—picture God's people accepting that sacrifice of sin and following through with determination to put sin out of their lives while striving to take in the righteousness of Christ. The third step is depicted by Pentecost—when God's Spirit was sent to the disciples when the Church was founded—so God the Father and Jesus Christ could

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In His Word God reveals that He set in motion truly amazing things before time again! If you'd like to discover much more about His amazing plan and what it means for you and your loved ones, request or download our booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. Both are yours free for the asking—get your free copies today!

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How Can I Find It Easier to PRAY?

Do you have difficulty finding motivation to pray? Do you find it hard to communicate with God? Consider this simple solution to enriching your prayer life! **by Ken Murray**

From visiting tours through India and Sri Lanka with my wife Ruth, we are finding increasing numbers of people who feel spiritually starved by the false religions and philosophies of this world, ruled by a hate-filled Satan the devil (2 Corinthians 4:4). They are eager to “seek God while He may be found” (Isaiah 55:6-7).

One lady with many difficult trials, who is earnestly seeking God, said to me recently on our visit to Sri Lanka: “I find it hard to pray. I want to seek God, but how can I overcome and find it easier to pray?”

Have you ever felt that way, too? I think this lady’s question touches a common nerve in many of us. It’s easy to have a natural aversion or procrastination toward praying to God.

Is there a secret key to unlocking aversion to prayer—an answer to this lady’s difficulty, which is common to many of us?

Not mere duty, but a privilege and joy

Prayer sometimes seems to people to be a bit like bodily exercise in experiencing the benefit: Once you get started, it feels good. And once you’ve finished, you feel even better. But getting started is sometimes difficult.

What was it that really stimulated and helped faithful servants of God like Joshua, Esther, David, Hannah, Daniel and Anna to pray to God?

Was it because they looked at prayer as a duty to perform, some type of obligation or an assignment to struggle through?

Or did they instead view prayer as a privilege, a loving talk with our loving, all-understanding God, an opportunity to communicate with our affectionate Father and our Savior Jesus, His Son?

Perhaps sometimes we don’t truly believe God really knows and cares about us individually and desires to listen to us. We may

intellectually know God cares for us, but do we really *believe* He does?

Faithful men and women of the past came to that reality. Surely we can too!

Yet there was a deeper understanding—



Those of us who are parents want warm and loving communication with our children. Wouldn’t God, the ultimate Father, desire that with you and me?

a secret key that motivated them in their prayers. What was it?

Approaching God in the right way

God, like any parent, wants to hear thoughts, words and actions of heartfelt love, thanks and requests from His children. Those of us who are parents want warm and loving communication with our children. Wouldn’t God, the ultimate Father, desire that with you and me?

There is a tremendous amount of fulfill-

ment in knowing that God is always there to guide us for our asking?

But, we should consider, is there a way of asking, seeking and knocking that God *will not* hear? And is there a way to ask, seek and knock that God *will* hear? Is there a secret to our asking, seeking and knocking (Matthew 7:7) and reaching God in prayer?

God is pleased with those who faithfully serve Him and will listen when they pray

for others. He tells us in James 5:16: “Pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

This scripture lets us know how important prayer is and that, though we are only human, God will honor the prayers of a righteous or faithful person who lives by His laws and principles of life (see also 1 John 3:22).

Now, is there a secret that enables this principle expressed by the apostle James

to really work in our prayers?

Yes there is! And this secret involves something that, sadly, not many people express in their prayers. Let's read a few scriptures and see if we can grasp this helpful secret to engaging in prayer.

What motivated servants of God to pray?

What was an important motivating force for Joshua to pray?

Notice Joshua 22:5: "But take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to *love the LORD your God*, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul [or being]" (emphasis added throughout).

Notice also Joshua 23:11: "Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, *that you love the LORD your God.*"

Let's consider another faithful servant of God, King David. What inspired and motivated him to pray?

Notice Psalm 18:1: "*I will love You, O LORD, my strength.*"

And Psalm 31:23: "*O love the LORD, all you His saints! For the LORD preserves the faithful, and fully repays the proud [arrogant] person.*"

And also Psalm 145:20: "The LORD preserves *all who love Him*, but all the wicked He will destroy."

And what key inspired the prophet Daniel and helped make it easier for him to pray?

Notice Daniel 9:4: "And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, 'O LORD, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy *with those who love Him*, and with those who keep His commandments.'"

What inspired Jesus Christ and motivated His close relationship with the Father?

See what He affirmed in Matthew 22:37: "You shall *love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" And as for Himself, He explained: "But that the world may know that *I love the Father*, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do" (John 14:31).

Declaring our love to God

In the examples above, the key to a powerful prayer life was *verbally expressing love toward God*.

Loving God detoxifies our minds from Satan, this world and our human nature. Loving God energizes us and motivates us

to pray and lovingly follow His laws and way of life.

That's why it's so good for us, in the morning and as soon as possible in our daily prayers, *to tell God we love Him* as our Father and that we love Jesus Christ as our guiding Savior, Advocate and Elder Brother.

A great secret is to actually think and speak the words in prayer, from our heart and mind: "I love you, God our Father, and Your Son Jesus, my Lord and Savior."

It is a beautiful way to awake in the morning, quietly thinking of God and telling Him how much we love Him. This is an exquisite way to start our day in the best possible way and it leads us to then pray more easily.

From expressing our love to God, prayer then naturally flows to repentance and asking forgiveness of our sins and to seeking Him for help, guidance, wisdom and strength, through God's Spirit, in keeping His commandments and showing our deep love to Him and to others.

From my personal experience, I know that one prayer that God always hears and mercifully answers is a sincere prayer of repentance for our sins (1 John 1:9; 1 John 3:4).

Of course, our words will prove sincere by our actions in life. In 1 John 5:2-3 God tells us *how* to love Him and others: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, *that we keep His commandments*. And His commandments are not burdensome."

Start each day on the right track

If we pray in love to God and read a chapter or two from the Bible each morning, we can be certain our day will go well for us, because we are close to our Father and are seeking His loving guidance and wisdom in our decision-making and in all we do in our lives.

Then throughout the day and into the evening before we go to bed, it's good to be lovingly mindful of God and how He desires us to live by His laws and way of life, which produces blessings for us.

Letting God know in our thoughts and words with Him that we love Him and are thankful for His love for us is a great secret in stimulating our relationship with Him, stirring up God's Spirit within us to motivate us to keenly pray and do God's will.

This, then, is a great secret stimulation to enriching our prayer life—telling God every day how much we love Him! **GN**



Who's behind *The Good News* magazine?

Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *The Good News* free to all who request it. Simply put, *The Good News* is provided by *people*—people from all walks of life, from all over the world, as enabled by God.

And those people have a common goal: **to proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded** (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought—the wonderful *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all the problems that have long plagued humankind. Through the pages of *The Good News*, various booklets (also free) and our *Beyond Today* TV program, we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and



threaten our very survival.

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Lessons From the Parables

Selling All for the Kingdom of God

Those things that are true and right are not purchased at any price. In fact, they have no material value. But that which is most valuable in this life requires that we be willing to give up everything in exchange for it. Most find this very difficult, if not impossible. **by Darris McNeely**

Jesus had been speaking to His disciples about land, fields and tangible, earthly things like seed, leaven and weeds. Matthew 13 contains some of the most famous examples He used to describe the Kingdom of Heaven and the Word of God. The Kingdom, He said, is like seed sown in a field, or “the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.”

Everyone who knows a farmer understands that land and seed are the essence of their life. You cannot be a farmer without land, and you must know how to sow good seed in a proper manner to, as is hoped, yield a good crop.

In fact, of the two, land is probably the heart of the unique life of farming. A farmer and his land become one. There’s a line from the famous novel *Gone With the Wind* where the father of Scarlett O’Hara takes her out to the fields and talks of the importance of owning, working and fighting for one’s land. The land, he explains, is “the only thing that lasts.”

That makes sense. And yet Jesus Christ presents something that contradicts this.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like

treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Matthew 13:44).

And as if the point is not made, He said it again with another example: “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (verses 45-46).

Note the repeated word “again.” It is almost as if Jesus didn’t want to stop talking about the Kingdom without driving home

Christ’s two parables about ultimate treasure are telling us quite clearly that we must be willing to part with all that we have to buy the great treasure or pearl of great price.

a key lesson. He had gone into much detail in relating parables about the Kingdom being like the sowing of seed (verses 18-19) and “like a man who sowed good seed in his field” (verse 24). Both these parables required lengthy explanations. Yet the

Kingdom of which Jesus spoke is so vast a subject that it cannot be fully explained in two examples.

Yet it is so simple that He could condense a point into one sentence.

To drive home the lesson, He adds two powerful word pictures to illustrate the all-in approach we must have to gain the Kingdom. “Sell all!” He says, and with whatever we then have, “buy that field” or “buy that pearl”!

It’s not the land itself in the parable that’s of highest value. It’s what is hidden in the field that makes it so valuable.

With the pearl merchant, it’s the one great pearl, among many pearls, that he finds and buys. In both short parables there is one action that has to be done. In both, a person had to “sell all that he had” to buy the treasure of ultimate value—and in real

life that treasure is the Kingdom.

There is one great lesson for us. Are we willing to sell all that we have to gain the Kingdom of which Jesus spoke? If not, we could find ourselves falling short of this most important goal.

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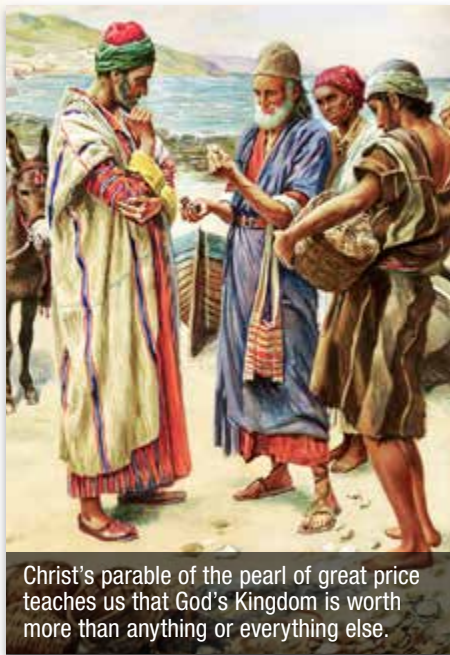
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Christ's parable of the pearl of great price teaches us that God's Kingdom is worth more than anything or everything else.

Getting rid of stuff

A couple of years ago my wife and I took a transfer in my job to another state. After 22 years in one home we had to get it ready for sale and prepare to pack all our possessions for the moving company. In 22 years you accumulate a lot of *stuff*. It's amazing how it grows in the closets, garages and basements of our homes. We quickly realized there was no need to move all this stuff. If we hadn't used it for years in the old home, why would we need it in another?

So we sorted through the stuff. We gave some away, especially any items of value that our children might want. We boxed up stuff and delivered it to the various charities that redistribute what you no longer need. After a few days we looked around the house and realized that we still had too much stuff and that perhaps a garage sale would help us get rid of the rest and put a few dollars in our pocket as well.

So we set up tables and put out the items for sale—and over two days sold most of the stuff. It was amazing. People came from our suburban neighborhood, and we met people who for all those years had lived just a few blocks from us but whom we never saw nor knew. They came, they looked, and they bought our stuff. But in the process my wife and I noticed something deeper.

Many of those who came were not there merely to buy. They were there because they needed to talk to someone about what was on their mind.

One lady had recently lost her husband to cancer and was lonely. She stood in our yard with our insignificant little castoff in

hand and told us how much she had loved her husband and how lonely life was now that he was gone. We were friendly strangers, but she felt she could talk—and on this sunny warm day and she had come looking not for a little trinket but for human contact with another person who would listen to her for a few minutes.

So we listened. She paid the 25 cents for our stuff, got into her car and drove off. The next day, I told my wife, she will be at another sale looking for someone else to hear her story.

Another man came to the sale and was interested in buying a set of stereo speakers I no longer used. He offered a lot less than I wanted, and I held out for something closer to what I thought was a proper value. We bargained for a time and finally, after about an hour, agreed to a price.

I thought he would put them into his truck and be off, but I was wrong. He asked for a glass of cold water. And while he was drinking he started telling me about his personal life.

His wife had recently left him. He was left to raise their teenage daughter while at the same time coping with the rejection by his wife. On top of it all, his business partner had recently absconded with the money from their business, and he was facing bankruptcy. All these revelations came within the few minutes it took him to drink the glass of water.

What did my wife and I conclude after two days of conversations like this as neighbors came to our yard to look through our accumulated stuff? We learned that *relationships* are more important than *stuff*. People are more interesting than all the possessions we can accumulate and hoard through a lifetime. We concluded that things, trinkets, stuff—whatever you want to call it—are of most value when used to direct us to the true values of life.

People are valuable. They are created in the image of God. Shared experiences of life are rich in lessons when they draw empathy and compassion from one to another. It isn't how much *stuff* you have at the end of your life that's important. What is of most value are the *relationships* you've gathered, maintained and preserved through a lifetime of focusing on others, on God and on His Kingdom.

We learned that the essence of God's Kingdom of Heaven is found in the shedding of stuff. We understood that when we do this, we are more able to clearly visualize the coming Kingdom. We finally

grasped what Jesus meant when He said, "Seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Jesus also directly stated that "one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15).

Life is not about stuff!

Christ's two parables about ultimate treasure in Matthew 13 are telling us quite clearly that we must be willing to part with all that we have to buy the great treasure or pearl of great price.

God's Kingdom is infinitely more valuable than any physical things we might obtain. Until we're willing to part with what we value above the Kingdom, we won't be able to capture the vision God holds out to each of us. When we're more interested in accumulating and holding onto money, cars, homes, status or pride and ego—all the modern idols our culture erects and worships—then we will not see nor possess the Kingdom of God.

Where are *you* in this story? Look around your room right now. Look at the car in your garage or the home you own. What do you see that you cannot part with, that you would not want to sell? What, among all your possessions, is more valuable than the treasure hid in a field or the pearl of great price?

Fix your gaze on that item and ask yourself: When it is old and broken, or tarnished and decayed, will it make you happy? Will you put it—whatever "it" is—before God and the one hope of eternal life He gives you? When you're struggling for your final breaths of life, will this thing comfort you with understanding about what your life has been about?

If you can honestly answer no to the above, then you are ready to buy the right field and the great pearl.

So what's holding you back? **GN**

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“Be of Good Cheer!”

Everyone needs encouragement. Are we following Christ's example in giving this precious gift? *by Robin Webber*

Geese are a wondrous sight to behold as they fly overhead in their well-known V-formation. Traveling vast, transcontinental distances, they exhibit some remarkable qualities.

For one, they rotate leadership within their flock while in flight. Also, they choose leaders who can stand turbulence while taking the lead position. And furthermore, the whole time one bird is in the lead, all the others are honking affirmation.

Sometimes, you can hear geese approaching from miles away. Even when you can barely see them, you know what's coming. They are encouraging the lead bird to move beyond the present duress of breaking the wind draft for others and to go the distance.

A simple question considering this example from nature: Are we as followers

coming but encouraged them not to permanently scatter. They could go the distance as He would if they truly believed. Indeed, we can too, so “be of good cheer!” In the King James Version of the Bible, this phrase is used four times in the Gospels and three times in the book of Acts to empower people to go the distance in their calling.

The original Greek word for cheer, *tharseo*, literally means courage or confidence. Encouragement is fundamentally the act of instilling courage in another person. Simply put, it's being God's agent in God's time to lift up God's children.

Isaiah 40:1 proclaims: “Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” says your God. “Speak comfort to Jerusalem . . .” The same chapter later declares in words familiar to many a reader of the Scriptures: “He gives power

another human being. Encouragement is as essential as water, food or air.

No one can live long without hope or encouragement. Yet it's been said that while 3 billion people go to bed hungry every night, 4 billion people go to bed starving for just one word of encouragement.

Each of us needs encouragement. It is oxygen to the soul. Life's chapters and lonely moments demand it from our first baby steps into a parent's open arms to later steps in life—to our first bike ride down a steep driveway; to becoming teens; to our first encounter with challenges on the job or in our marriages; to a health crisis; to becoming senior citizens in the so-called golden years of life; to, as may be you this very moment, stepping out in faith to embrace biblically based Christianity when no one else seems to support you.

We need to grow in encouraging others even when it does not come naturally. And in fact the type of encouragement we should be giving does *not* come naturally. The encouragement exuded by our example Jesus Christ comes from elsewhere. It is rooted in God and understanding what He has done for us.

The apostle Paul opens one of his letters this way: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

The original Greek word for “comfort” in this passage is *paraklesis*, which literally means “a calling to one's side.” A form of this word is used in describing the Holy Spirit in John 14-16 (variously translated as Comforter, Helper or Advocate). Thus, we can come to appreciate that comforting or encouraging someone is God's Holy Spirit in action in you, because you have come to appreciate what God has done for you and now you pass it on.

Encouragement is as essential as water, food or air. No one can live long without hope or encouragement.

of Jesus Christ doing as well at encouragement? Contemplate for a moment which of the following best describes you personally.

I find encouraging others: 1) Natural, 2) Fairly easy, 3) Difficult, 4) Someone else's job, 5) Simply not on my mind.

Now, why did I ask you to compare yourself to a bunch of feathered fowl in this regard? Because encouraging others is vital in our responding to the call of Jesus Christ of “Follow Me.”

Hope in moments of despair

Consider for a moment the example of Jesus encouraging others at the end of His ministry and human life. The night before His death, He told His disciples: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

He warned them that turbulence was

to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength . . . Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (verses 29-31).

How does this work? Is this performed only by miraculous intervention from on high, or is this also accomplished by individuals with Christ residing in them motivating others?

It is foundational to embrace the spiritual reality and personal responsibility that if Jesus Christ is “head over all things to the church, which is His body” (Ephesians 1:22-23), then we are to be His feet to do His walking, His arms to do His reaching, and His tongue to remind others to “be of good cheer!”

The need is all around us

There is certainly a target-rich environment all around us in considering how to instill courage and the peace of God within

Where do we begin?

How then do we encourage those in need? After all, there are so many. Let's

appreciate the lesson, as found in the Gospels, that Jesus dealt with those who were specifically in His path or came to Him. While human, He couldn't possibly deal with everyone, even as the Son of God, and neither can we. We need to realistically engage those who are in our "life's path" or, in modern parlance, our sphere of influence.

Keep in mind that godly encouragement is sincere and motivated by the love of

Additionally, at times it's not what you say but what you *don't* say that's just as important. Giving your *undivided attention* to someone who is down-and-out is a valuable gift of encouragement. It promotes self-worth and dignity to the recipient.

Sometimes the less said, the better. Sometimes there are *no* words that will do, and the only thing is to hug people and let them know you are there, praying for them,

agement motivated Peter to get out of the boat and walk on water at least briefly.

In like manner, our very presence in turbulent moments and offering simple words of encouragement can motivate people to do things, go places and rise to occasions they might never contemplate on their own. Just like the geese mentioned earlier, our affirmation can sustain those who are struggling through the turbulence of life, helping those who feel helpless, hopeless and perhaps unloved.

Never too late!

You might be saying, "But all those wasted years and opportunities when I could have been there for someone rather than merely waiting on the receiving end of life." No, it's not too late! And your greatest opportunity may yet lie ahead. Never underestimate God and what God might do through you.

It's noteworthy that at the very end of His human life, Jesus, who had spoken many a time to others to "be of good cheer" was Himself encouraged by a thief on the cross next to His saying, "This Man has done nothing wrong . . . Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:41-42).

Can we even begin to imagine what those few words meant to our Savior, the Son of Man, in tremendous physical torment, as so many others standing there were taunting Him? Did it help Him go the distance as one "came up alongside" of Him? Think about it.

You and I have an incredible opportunity to emulate the greatest encourager of all time. He stands ready to mentor us to help us obey His call of "Follow Me."

It can be a little overwhelming at first to *give* encouragement rather than be on the receiving end, but we will have help. Consider the last words of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew: "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (28:20). No words more encouraging than that! **GN**



In the animal world, geese can teach us an important lesson about the need to encourage others.

Christ with no thought of return. This column is not promoting a merit star chart on your wall of how many people you encouraged this week or undue flattery that's basically "dead on arrival."

A pivotal element of encouragement is honesty. Proverbs 27:6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." Sometimes while you have your arm around a family member's or friend's shoulder, you have to "tell it like it is." Why? So that even while being comforted, that person can be encouraged to better direct his or her life's energies to beneficial results.

Simple steps towards profound results

Here are a few simple steps toward encouraging those you love and those who will yet cross your life's path.

1. *Consider the choice and power of your words.* They can penetrate deeper than any x-ray machine for good or ill.

If ever a man needed encouragement, it was the patriarch Job. Consider the words of Job's friends, effectively accusing him, "You're a sinner!" Contemplate the words of Job's wife: "Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9).

Compare these with Jesus' words to the woman caught in adultery: "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11). He confirmed she had broken God's law, but at the same time He opened a door to a new life. Proverbs 25:11 points out, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." The right words of encouragement are precious.

and that you will not abandon your relationship with them—that you will be there for them on the rest of their journey (and we'll see more about this in a moment).

2. *Send a message.* Consider dropping a handwritten note (special!) or an e-mail to someone. Have you ever received a letter or just a little note from someone that made your day or, better still, changed your life's direction?

It may seem small or trivial, but a note gets the ball rolling and gets something done rather than wishful thinking that ends in "woulda, coulda, shoulda."

So often we think we'll have the time to visit, but life intervenes. Letters travel where you can't go, and this gives your loving encouragement an extension cord. Also, receiving a note can be less obtrusive, greeting and meeting recipients on *their* terms. A note will be remembered and possibly reviewed often. Just think how many of the epistles of Paul were effectively letters of encouragement.

3. *Be there for people.* Never underestimate being present in someone's life—be it a family member, neighbor, coworker or fellow church member. Just showing up speaks volumes.

In one of the most amazing stories in the Gospels, found in Matthew 14:22-23, we find the disciples in storm-tossed waters in the dark of night and Christ making His presence known by walking on the sea toward them, saying: "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid" (verse 27). His presence and encour-

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What Is God's Will for You?

Every day we have to make decisions. Many of them we make without thinking. But some are big decisions in life that might make us stop and wonder: *What does God want me to do here?* Is there a way to understand what God's will is and how we can accomplish it?

A young adult in the United States wrote: "I still feel like God hasn't answered me. My personal life is stuck in a rut, and I can't get out of it. I've been praying and praying, but God is just not ready to answer me yet. I feel there is something more I need to learn before He will allow my life to move forward into the next phase. It's very frustrating, and it's at times like this that I wish God would just send an angel with the answer, 'You need to . . .' but it just doesn't happen that way."

So how are we to approach the matter?

This study focuses on biblical strategies for making good decisions—for understanding what God wants you to do in the challenging choices you face in life. The Bible offers help and great hope!

What does the Bible say God wants you to do?

Nowhere in the Bible are any of us mentioned by name and told precisely what God expects of us in our lifetime—what job to take, whom to marry, where to live, and so on. But is there any place in the Bible where we can find out what God wants for us?

► How does God want you to live?

"So [Jesus] said to him, ' . . . But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments'" (Matthew 19:17).

Much of mainstream Christianity claims that the commandments were done away with—that they were nailed with Christ to the cross. Not so! Here Jesus gives a very clear directive: If we want to enter into eternal life, part of the requirements is keeping God's commandments. At their core, these commandments all stem from love—love toward God and love toward our fellow man (Matthew 22:36-40).

With Jesus Christ as our example, we find that the true path to greatness lies not in wielding power, but in serving and loving others—just as Christ served and loved us (Matthew 20:25-28).

► Does God want you to get married?

"He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD" (Proverbs 18:22).

God created marriage because He knows that "it is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). We were designed in such a way that marriage, lived according to God's laws, empowers a husband and a wife to live and work together as one cohesive, effective unit in a way that single individuals cannot. Marriage is an institution both encouraged and blessed by God.

The apostle Paul, however, recognized that for some situations and some people, remaining single is a better choice (1 Corinthians 7:26-27). For more on this big subject, request or download our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* (at www.GNmagazine.org/booklets).



► What job does God want you to take?

"Now as they heard these things, He [Jesus] spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore He said: 'A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas [units of money], and said to them, "Do business till I come." But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us."'"

"And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, "Master, your mina has earned ten minas." And he said to him, "Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities."

"And the second came, saying, "Master, your mina has earned five minas." Likewise he said to him, "You also be over five cities."

"Then another came, saying, "Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow." And he said to him, "Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?""

Like the nobleman, God has entrusted to each of us a certain number of "minas"—in our case, talents and abilities we are to make use of until called to account for what we have done with what He has given us. We need to discover, with God's help and guidance, how we can best put those talents to use, and then do so. But the Bible doesn't tell us which career or specific job to take.

How can we make wise choices in harmony with God's will?

Rarely in life are we faced with only one bad choice and one

good choice. Far more frequently, we will find many choices that lie within God's will for us, and many that don't. When we come to that fork in the road, how do we decide which path to travel?

► **Have you asked God for guidance?**

"For You are my rock and my fortress; therefore, for Your name's sake, lead me and guide me" (Psalm 31:3).

"Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (Psalm 37:4-5).

Our Creator knows best, so in all the major decisions we have to consider it makes sense to ask Him for His guidance. He may not point specifically at one path, but He can provide us with the wisdom we need to choose a path that's pleasing to Him.

As the Good News Bible renders Romans 12:2: "Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God—what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect."

► **Are the options you are considering in accordance with godly principles found in the Bible?**

"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live . . ." (Deuteronomy 30:19).

If an option—however promising—requires disobeying God's instructions as revealed through the whole of Scripture, it is out of the question.

► **Have you asked trusted experts and wise individuals for advice?**

"Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14).

Two heads are often better than one, since others may approach our dilemma from a different angle than we would, affording us new options and possibly a better solution than any we could come up with on our own.

God has a future and a hope prepared for *you*—not just the world, not just the nations, not just those *around* you, but *you*—you specifically!

► **What are the pros and cons?**

"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'?" (Luke 14:28-30).

Before choosing a direction, it is important to weigh the positives and negatives of that path. If we don't have a clear idea of what we're committing to, or what it will cost us, we may regret it—after it's too late to turn back.

► **Where are you trying to go?**

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

All of our plans should be made with the ultimate destination of God's Kingdom in mind. Then we must make specific plans for our education, career, family, etc. Where are you now, and what decisions will move you toward where you want to be in the future?

► **Will you take action?**

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there

is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going" (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

After we settle on a direction to travel, it's time to act. It's impossible to see where we're going if we're always looking back.

What about beyond here and now?

The above scriptures deal with the present. But what does God have planned beyond the here and now?

► **What does God intend for you?**

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

Though this scripture had a specific historical context for the Jews during the Babylonian captivity, it also reveals God's desire for each of us. He has a future and a hope prepared for *you*—not just the world, not just the nations, not just those *around* you, but *you*—you specifically!

► **So what is that future and hope?**

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Not only has God called us out of darkness and given us mercy, He has also given us the chance to be His people, a royal priesthood. After Christ's return, His people will serve Him as "kings and priests" in His Kingdom (Revelation 1:6).

► **What will life in God's Kingdom be like?**

"But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him'" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

What God has planned for us is something so amazing, so awe-inspiring, that our limited human senses cannot even begin to grasp "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." One

of the few reference points we are given is in Romans 8:18, where the apostle Paul states that "the sufferings

of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

God, the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17), has an awesome future in store for you!

Apply what you've learned!

Using a concordance such as those found online or in the back of some Bibles, look up words related to a subject you are wrestling with (marriage, work, friends, etc.). Following the steps given in this lesson under the section "How can we make wise choices in harmony with God's will?" and using your search results, map out a plan for taking action—and then act!

Also, be sure to download or request your free copy of our booklet *What Is Your Destiny?* To make wise decisions, it helps if you understand the purpose of life and what God is preparing you for in the future. This free booklet will help you see, from the pages of your own Bible, the incredible future God has in store for you! **GN**



Letters From Our Readers

"Why Are You Here?"

"Why Are You Here?" in your May/June issue was an amazing article. Our potential destiny comes so clear. This article has truly helped me to refocus my life in a more meaningful direction. What an awesome future God has offered. And what a loving God to send His Son to die for our sins. We owe both the Father and the Son so much, and we have a lot to live up to.

B.E., Cheshire, England

"The Abortion Debate"

Your May/June issue was so very informative, especially the article about abortion. I had always been pro-choice until I read that article. Now I'm totally against abortion. I was very surprised at the extent of abortions worldwide. Other features were great as well, such as "Exploring God's Word," "The Bible and You," "Follow Me" and the Beyond Today article "Change Your Life Story." Keep up the good work, as always.

W.S., North Carolina

Beyond Today

I would like to thank your magazine staff and your ministry for shedding light on false religious practices and traditional church habits that are ungodly and not found in the Holy Bible. My family and I have learned so much from your magazine articles and your *Beyond Today* television ministry. You have opened our eyes, minds and hearts to what is the real gospel and what is the false gospel. Enclosed is a money order to help support your magazine and your TV ministry. It's not a lot, but I felt led by the Holy Spirit to give it. You have helped me and my family so much that I would like to contribute in some small way.

B.S., Detroit, Michigan

We deeply appreciate and welcome support from our readers and viewers. It helps enable Christ's gospel to go out to the nations.

The Good News

I have been receiving your wonderful magazine for about two years and finally got around to writing to you. This newest edition is really great. You are always "established in the present truth," as Peter wrote. Your magazine is always up to date on the news, along with your observations and exhortations.

A.D., Stephenville, Texas

I have been receiving your magazine, which is so true, descriptive and inspiring. And I do appreciate your predictions, which have come to pass with time. Although I have read my Bible through twice, I find your magazine necessary to remind us of where we are today.

O.S.F., St. Louis, Missouri

Thank you for a great read, one full of the major factors affecting our lives in so many ways. I wouldn't know what to do without it. I do believe that the next 10-20 years are critical to all of us. Keep up the good work of alerting mankind to the extreme dangers we face unless we turn to God wholly and completely.

Reader from New South Wales, Australia

We love your magazine. What a treasure trove of truth!

J. & E.N., Bremerton, Washington

Your magazine always gives food for thought. I struggle with some of your doctrines, but also receive biblical and spiritual nourishment from many of your articles.

S.S., Gillingham, England

We appreciate your balanced attitude, and you can always practice what the Bereans did: "They received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Readers from France

Would you accept to stop sending me *Bonnes Nouvelles* [The French edition of *The Good News*]? I am sorry, but I have to read only the magazines and booklets published by the traditional churches (Protestants, Anglicans, etc.).

R.C., Tulle, France

*We will of course cancel a subscription on request. Still, we recommend that you request our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built* and read the following letter. The traditional churches have diverged widely from Christ's teachings.*

I have been reading *The Good News* for two years now. I ask others to read the magazine now and then. So they hear about the Bible of which they have had no previous knowledge. The documentation in each issue is paramount in bringing transformation to people who really take the time to read it until they are permeated by the sacred words of God. Your magazine is well worth reading.

D.C., Amboise, France

Reader comments from Australasia

My friends have been lending me their copies of *The Good News* magazine. However, I would be grateful if you could send me my own subscription. I have received your booklets before and would like to thank you for sending them to me.

Reader from Papua New Guinea

I get *The Good News* and I really enjoy it. At night I sit down to read it and use it to study my Bible, which is what I enjoy doing. And I look forward to the booklets.

Reader from Queensland

I have searched far and wide for truth and understanding, and I finally found it in your organization. I am in complete agreement with your beliefs and literature. I have access to *The Good News* magazine, which is on display at a local shopping centre near my house. I enjoy reading it ever so much.

Reader from New South Wales

Readers appreciate free booklets

Thank you for the booklets you have provided me. I have been very blessed by your information and teaching. The booklets are easy to read and have given me a much greater understanding on the subjects covered.

Armed with the wonderful information that the booklets supply, I am hoping to be able to teach my daughter and her friends the truth that other churches do not. There is such a lack of solid biblical teaching in the churches that we have previously attended. So I am very blessed to be reading your booklets. I love sharing them with people, and I hope they feel the same way.

Reader from Victoria, Australia

I so look forward to receiving your booklets, and I learn so much from them. They explain the Scriptures very clearly in a way that I can relate to and remember them. Thank you for keeping up the valuable work which is needed by many—a very worthy mission in spreading His word.

E.W., Romford, England

Good News for those in prison

I have served prison time, benefitting from your generous giving of materials. It helped me to debunk the theory of the Trinity, the failure to fit three days and three nights between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, and much more.

I truly believe that the United Church of God is the true Church here on earth. A lot of inmates do feign religious interest for ulterior motives, but I didn't. I still fail to live up to God's expectations, but the Holy Spirit convicts me, and I ask God for forgiveness. I can tell you from personal experience that the Lord is

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Are you on Facebook? If so, visit our *Good News* magazine page. See what other readers are saying. Find links to interesting articles and Web commentaries. Become a *Good News* magazine Facebook fan!

I really enjoy *The Good News* magazine. It gives a good understanding of the Bible and highlights information not given in mainstream Christian faiths. I highly recommend this magazine to all.

- K.T., *Good News* magazine Facebook fan



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Questions & Answers

Q: Is tithing really a part of New Testament teaching?

A.F., Feltham, England

A: Jesus Christ Himself upheld the practice of tithing in the New Testament. He said: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin [that is, various herbs], and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, *without leaving the others* [tithes] *undone*" (Matthew 23:23; compare Luke 11:42, emphasis added throughout).

Here, only days before His death by crucifixion, Christ plainly confirmed that tithing should be practiced, along with spiritual adherence to the "weightier" matters that the scribes and Pharisees were obviously neglecting.

God had earlier instructed the Israelites to support the tribe of Levi for its temple service. They did this by giving the Levites God's tithe—this support providing the means for Israel to worship the Creator and be taught according to His will.

But with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the functioning of the Levitical priesthood in the national worship system was not able to continue in the same way. Moreover, Jesus had given the awesome responsibility to proclaim God's truth to the Church He built (Matthew 16:18; 28:18-20).

Even prior to the temple's destruction, members of God's Church and followers of the gospel message gave monetary and other types of aid to Jesus and His apostles, disciples and later other laborers helping to spread the gospel. The work Christ had given His Church to do had to be supported (1 Corinthians 9:9-14).

Anticipating the end of the national worship system, Hebrews 7:12 refers to a change in the administration of tithing that accompanied a change in the priesthood. In verses 1-19 it's explained that the ancestor of the Levites, Abraham, paid tithes to the priest-king Melchizedek—a figure called the "king of righteousness" and "king of peace," with no beginning or end, who was evidently the preincarnate Jesus (see our free booklet *Who Is God?*). And now the tithes would go directly to Melchizedek again through His representatives.

The New Testament Church—the *spiritual* temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:19-22)—was superior to the physical temple that was destroyed when Jerusalem fell to the Roman army. And as the Church's representatives, the New Testament apostles became the recipients of the tithes of God's people (see Acts 4:35-37).

When we carefully explore the New Testament and the experience of the early Church, we should understand that the emergence of the Church

did not mean a radical departure from the religious practices of the nation of Israel. Both the apostles Peter and Paul clearly upheld Old Testament teachings (2 Peter 1:20-21; 3:2, 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:15-17).

Not until several decades after the founding of the New Testament Church does the book of Hebrews clarify the impact this new spiritual administration involving tithing had on the Church.

Because of its continuance in Old Testament practices, though sometimes applied in a new way, for decades the Church was regarded by outsiders as merely another sect of the Jews, but one that believed in the divinity of Jesus Christ. The Church is the spiritual forerunner in Israel's New Covenant relationship with God and is even called "the Israel of God" in Galatians 6:16.

The opportunity for salvation was extended beyond the nation of Israel and offered to non-Israelites—those who would be called into the Church from all nations, being thereby grafted into Israel (see Romans 11; Ephesians 2:11-19; 1 Peter 2:9-10). This new spiritual nation would provide obedience through a converted heart (Matthew 21:43).

Therefore, no sharp break in the application of laws and principles from the Old Testament is indicated in the New Testament, one third of which is composed of either quotations or allusions from the Hebrew Scriptures. The Church was "built upon the foundation of the apostles *and the prophets*, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20).

The teachings and specific examples from the Old Testament were written for the benefit of the New Testament Church through the ages (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11). We should play very close attention to the Hebrew Scriptures. In a prophecy before Christ's second coming, we are admonished to "*remember the Law of Moses*" (Malachi 4:4).

Tithing is a God-given law. That law (and the proper application of its principles) has continuing relevance for the 21st-century Church, its members and prospective members—everyone who is in contact with God's truth. (To understand the true relationship between the law of God and basic New Testament teaching, request or download a copy of our free book *The New Covenant: Does It Abolish God's Law?*)

Supporting the work of God's Church today remains very important. Not only is it proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom of God to all nations (Matthew 24:14), but it is also preparing those who will assist Christ in bringing God's righteousness to this earth during His coming millennial reign. For a more in-depth explanation of tithing, request or download our free booklet *What Does the Bible Teach About Tithing?*

long on forgiveness and very merciful. Thank you very much for opening my eyes and continuing to teach me.

P.K., Milwaukee, Wisconsin

You may wish to request our free booklet This Is the United Church of God.

I am a Nigerian inmate incarcerated here in Thailand since 2009. So I am very happy to have come across your magazine *The Good News*. I have read your article about "Hope and Restoration," a story about the Prodigal Son. It moved me and touched my emotions deeply. It showed how to restore broken relationships. Please, may I request that you include my name on the mailing list of this Spirit-filled magazine?

P.M.D., Thailand

Bible Study Course

I would like to inform you that your Bible Study lessons that I receive have

nourished and transformed me. The information helps me to do what is right. I really relate to a God who I know is real and true. I just came out of a belief that I couldn't find any basis for in the Word of God. Thank you for your generosity.

R.H., Hong Kong

I have come to the end of the 12 lessons of your *Bible Study Course*, and I would like to thank the ministry and staff for providing the important opportunity to see the truth of God's Word in a way that is easy to understand. I recommend it to anyone who is sincerely seeking to know God and His will for their lives.

C.M., Leighlinbridge, Ireland

Published letters may be edited for clarity and space. Address your letters to *The Good News*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A., or e-mail ginfo@ucg.org (please be sure to include your full name, city, state or province, and country).

Stacking the Ultimate Relationship



Puzzled about relationships, love and marriage? For keys to understanding, take a new look at a child's favorite toy! *by Gayle Hoefker*

When my children were small, one of the toys we played with was a Fisher-Price Rock-a-Stack. Seven colored, plastic, donut-shaped rings were stacked on a central yellow pole. It was one of my favorite learning toys for the kids. It taught colors and hand-eye coordination and was mentally stimulating, as they learned that to get all the rings on the pole they had to put them on in the correct order. It always thrilled them to put the final small purple ring on top, because they knew they had done it correctly.

For certain kinds of puzzles, there is only one way to complete them. Building relationships that lead ultimately to marriage is like a step-by-step puzzle too. For the relationship to work out, we have to have a firm foundation on which to build—and then build it in the correct order. If we don't stack the pieces of our relationship in the

right order, we'll never experience the thrill and joy of placing the final piece on our relationship tower.

Spiritual foundation

The largest ring on a good relationship tower comes first. It's something that's not usually considered important before searching for a mate. But it's the foundation for all our friendships as well as the greatest relationship God created for a man and woman. This primary ring is the spiritual foundation. A successful marriage is one in which God, as the author of marriage, is central to the relationship.

We don't usually look at people to see if they are spiritual, but if we associate with people of like faith, they will tend to have the same spiritual values we do. We meet such friends at church services, church camps, church-sponsored family events or the annual religious festivals. If you're

associating with people of your own faith, you have a greater chance of meeting someone with spiritual values like yours.

Physical attraction

We usually first notice someone as a potential romantic interest because we are physically attracted to him or her. Physical attraction is the second ring in our relationship building. We may have been attracted by the person's vivid eye color, beautiful hair, engaging smile or buff muscles. Whatever it is that attracts us, it makes us want to go meet this person.

Social connectedness

After engaging in conversation with this person, you'll begin learning about him or her. If it's impossible to carry on a conversation, there likely isn't even the possibility of a friendship relationship.

The third ring on our relationship building tower is social connectedness. As social beings, we can range from very introverted to very extroverted. We will be drawn to people who balance us and to those with

whom we feel at ease. This is when you begin to determine if you could spend a lifetime with a potential spouse.

Mental compatibility

During conversations, we learn how the other person thinks, what he or she thinks about, and on what level. If you're on the same or similar mental level, you'll enjoy the conversation and find it stimulating. You will tend to mentally sharpen each other, like the words of the proverb: "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance [the face, as it reflects the mind] of his friend" (Proverbs 27:17). Each will be able to give and take during conversation and share his or her knowledge and learn. Mental compatibility is the fourth ring on your relationship tower.

Emotional maturity

Following closely behind mental compatibility is emotional maturity, the fifth vital ring for the relationship. Many relationships have failed to thrive because the couple was emotionally incompatible. Both partners must be emotionally mature

Sexual connection

After progressively making the previous six steps in a relationship, a spiritually and psychologically secure person is now able to commit to the capstone—the last piece to be put in place—in a relationship between a man and a woman. Regrettably, in many relationships today this step is put first instead of last. But like the rings on the Rock-a-Stack, the tower is not able to be fully assembled and complete without putting all the parts together in the right order.

My children often wanted to put the smallest ring on first because it fit their tiny hand so well, or because the color was so bright and appealing. In the relationship between a man and a woman, the sexual aspect is often what many focus on because it is appealing.

The sexual relationship is the capstone ring of a husband-and-wife relationship. It helps to hold everything else together when it is put on last. It's a unique binding ingredient if it's put on in the right order. But when it's put on in the *wrong* order, it's destructive to a relationship. It cannot be

Building a relationship is very much like putting a stacking puzzle together. Each piece is needed, but only in the correct order, in the correct location and at the right time.

and thus able to discuss their feelings, their desires and their thoughts in an open manner. Each must be ready to shoulder the emotional responsibilities required of them if the relationship is to have a future. A relationship and later the marriage will grow and develop as each supports the other every day.

Psychological security

Emotional maturity leads to being psychologically secure. Emotionally you understand that your partner will be there for and with you. Psychologically, this stabilizes you in knowing you will always have a support to help you. This security makes each of you stable people in your relationship, your family, your work and your church congregation. This is pictured by the commitment to marriage in the wedding ceremony. It's a public declaration of your commitment. Psychological stability is the vital sixth ring in a relationship that will last.

the effective binder it was intended to be if the other parts of the relationship are not in place first.

Ultimate man-woman relationship

How can you have the ultimate man-woman relationship that will thrill you and bring great joy? The ultimate relationship between two people is built the same way that the tower is built on the Rock-a-Stack. The rings must be put on in the right order. When the parts of a relationship are put on in that way, without skipping any of them, the ultimate relationship can be achieved.

The stacking puzzle was a favorite of my children. They loved it when they completed their tower. Building a relationship is very much like putting such a puzzle together. Each piece is needed, but only in the correct order, in the correct location and at the right time. To build your ultimate man-woman relationship that culminates in a happy and strong marriage, build it the right way! **GN**



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Why Were You Born? Why Are You Here? What Is Your Destiny?

Does your life have purpose? Does it have real meaning? Is life anything more than a brief span on earth, with nothing but emptiness beyond this physical existence?

This is the question of the ages, a riddle that has challenged human beings since they came to be: Why am I here? Why do I exist? Is there a purpose for my existence?

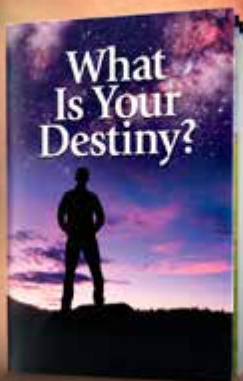
Thousands of years ago, the biblical King David looked up into the night sky and wrote down his thoughts regarding man's relationship to his Creator: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?"

David wondered about the purpose of man just as we do today. He wondered why God is so concerned with human beings and their future and what role we have in His plan. Every one of us was created for a purpose, but few understand

what that great purpose is. Do you?

David perceived that no part of God's physical creation even begins to compare with His purpose for you and me! He continued describing God's purpose for mankind: "You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of your hands."

Perhaps David had in mind God's earlier proclamation through Moses that "the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven . . . the LORD Your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage."



Being crowned with glory and honor—having dominion over all God's works—being given the sun, stars and heavenly bodies as a heritage—what does it all mean? You need to know! Our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?* will help you understand the incredible truth about why you were born! For your

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