

THE Plain Truth

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A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Jan -Mar 2019

Don't Cry
for Jesus. P.5

Two Lessons About
Generosity. P.16

Can we believe
the promises of God? P.19

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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Jesus summarizes your story

As we enter 2019, we reminisce our experiences of the past year – some good, some bad. We make some New Year resolutions to improve our quality of life in areas where we have slipped or fared badly – all very noble effort!

Life has no undo button

On my way to work every morning, I pass by a shop called UNDO. It is a School of 3D Animation. I suppose the owner chose that name to impress upon the students that their animation projects would not always measure up, and they would need to *undo* their wrong steps and *redo* until they get them right!

Most software today comes with an Undo button, which lets you to undo your wrong steps until you get them right. It allows you to backtrack many steps to help you fix your errors!

Unfortunately, our life has no Undo button! Once we mess up, we have to live with it all our life. We cannot go back in time and amend (undo) our wrongs. Our bad choices, failures and sin continue to pop up - at least from time to time. We may regret our actions, but we cannot change them.

We wish we could do life all over again! Recognizing this weakness, some religions offer a clever solution – they offer several cycles of rebirth – hoping we could get our acts right in one of these cycles! Some say they have up to seven cycles to make it.

The truth is we will still mess up and fall short of the perfection God demands of us.

So, are we helpless and doomed?

Jesus lived a perfect life on your behalf

God demands perfection in all areas of our life - in one life cycle! He demands perfect worship and obedience, perfect work ethics, perfect relationship with fellowman, and perfect love, mercy and kindness. We can never attain that kind of perfection in a million life cycles.

Adam (representing all humanity) brought death because of sin, disobedience, and unbelief. Sin *alienated* us from God. We lost sight of God's purpose for us, and we lost sight of who God is, and who we are. Sin brought misery - to us and to others. It brought a low quality, mediocre life. We are helpless to do anything about it unless someone comes to rescue us from the grip of sin.

That someone has indeed come in the Person of Jesus



By
Dr. P. Sellappan

Christ. Jesus came to rescue us from sin and death. He came to *undo* Adam's (and our) sin and its bad effects. He came to cancel our sin once for all and give us an abundant life. That was his mission. Thank God, he has successfully accomplished that mission for us, and is inviting us to receive his offer of salvation.

Jesus obeyed God perfectly. He fulfilled God's two great commandments – "love God with all your heart, mind and soul, and love your neighbour as yourself." Jesus did not scheme and plot for power, fame or wealth. He did not lie, steal, or abuse anyone. He did not harbour malice or ill will toward anyone. He was not envious or jealous of anyone. He did not hate or take revenge on anyone. Instead, he loved his enemies, forgave them, prayed for them, and finally gave his life for them.



Jesus became sin for us.¹ He assumed our sin (and sinful nature) and overcame it through *blood, sweat* and *tears* throughout his earthly life.² He defeated sin in the flesh completely once for all.³ He settled everything that was against us - on the cross. In his resurrection, he gives us his perfection, righteousness, holiness. All this is sheer grace - flowing from a God who loves us lavishly. All we can do is receive this precious gift with open hands and with a heart of gratitude and thankfulness.

Sin brought condemnation; God's grace brought justification, sanctification and eternal life through his son Jesus. Jesus came to *undo* our sin, mend our dented relationship and restore us to God who loves and cares for us.

Jesus experienced everything we experience – our fear, worry, anxiety, pain, suffering, loneliness, shame, guilt and hopelessness. All we experience he experiences. How is that possible?

Because all things (including our life) consist in him.⁴ We are in him, and we live and move and have our being in him⁵ – albeit mystically and mysteriously. He has been with us from the first cry at birth to the last cry at death. That is how intimately he knows us. *He is all and in all.*

Jesus summarizes your story. His birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension is also your story. He came for you, on your behalf, as you - vicariously. Let us thank God and receive his gift of life with a grateful heart. □

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:21
² Hebrews 5:7
³ 1 Corinthians 15:55-57
⁴ Colossians 1:17
⁵ Acts 17:28
⁶ Ephesians 4:6, Colossians 3:11

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What our readers say:

The Plain Truth is enlightening, factual, and thought-provoking. The articles are well written by experienced writers. I have come to understand the Word of God better. It helps me to relate to others better.

Kakak Luhin Kuching

I never really understood the doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation and their implications to our salvation and eternal life. Your articles have explained these two doctrines clearly and why they are central to the Christian faith. Trinity tells us that God is a relationship God. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit enjoy a dynamic relationship that is so wholesome, joyful and satisfying. God created us so we might participate in his relationship. That is truly amazing! Incarnation tells us that the Word of God became human in the person of Jesus Christ (without ceasing to be God) to unite God and humans via his incarnate self. As God, Jesus united all of God to humanity, and as man, Jesus united all of humanity to God. Jesus demonstrated God's love to humanity perfectly, and simultaneously offered perfect obedience and worship to God in our place, on our behalf. In his resurrection, he has given his perfect humanity to us as a gift. Your articles have expounded these rarely discussed truths so brilliantly. Thank you!
JS

Ed: Thanks for your compliment. Yes, God calls us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:8).

I love reading The Plain Truth as it lifts me up when I am down. So keep on doing the good work and God's blessing will follow you.

Marina Peter Klang

I am happy to see that The Plain Truth has come alive. Praise and thank God. To all you good people who make this magazine touch many readers' hearts I thank you. May all your efforts produce a bountiful harvest in the years to come. Enclosed is my small donation.

William Gomez Butterworth

Ed: Thank you all for your generous contributions – greatly appreciated! Your offering will certainly help us to send the magazine to everyone who requests it.

What a magazine that is filled with so many life stories. How can you afford sending

such a quality magazine free of charge to thousands? I love the magazine and thank you for your generosity.

Anonymous Selangor

Thank you very much for The Plain Truth magazine. I have enjoyed reading the articles and have given it to friends to read too.

Dr Lucy Seet Singapore

The Plain Truth is a good magazine for all - irrespective of race, religion, or age. The topics are relevant and interesting. Reading it has improved my English and my knowledge of Christianity. Please continue sending me the magazine. Your work is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

See Yok Bee Kulai

The Plain Truth is very informative, provides eye-opening spiritual knowledge from the Word of God, the Bible. The articles are well written and explained clearly. Keep going without hindrance in your wonderful gospel publication. My best compliments to the Editorial Team who has sacrificed their time and energy to bring this wonderful spiritual magazine. May God bless you all.

Ramachandran Klang

I have been receiving for the past few months and I like to say that it is a great magazine. I have benefited from it greatly. Thank you for the wonderful magazine and may God bless your great effort in spreading the good news!

Gilbert Seow Singapore

The Plain Truth is sharing spiritual truths through its many articles. Thank you for helping us face the challenges and uncertainties of life.

Lee Leok Soon & family Petaling Jaya

Here is my small contribution of RM 25.00 for the excellent work you are doing, not just for us Christians, but for everybody. Many Thanks.

Victor E Jesudoss Kuala Lumpur

I have been receiving your wonderful magazine for the past 3 years. Even though I am a born again Christian, The Plain Truth has increased my bible knowledge greatly.

David Nadar Banting

I am enjoying all your articles for the past few years. Please continue your great work. It fills my days and nights with the love of the Almighty. God bless everyone who is doing this wonderful work. I hope you will continue to send me the magazine.

P Paranjothi Yanok Perak

The Plain Truth magazine is an exceptional scripture-based magazine and I am glad to be included in your mailing list. To this day I am still using some of the articles from your magazine for teaching and references. Thank you. God Bless.

Anonymous

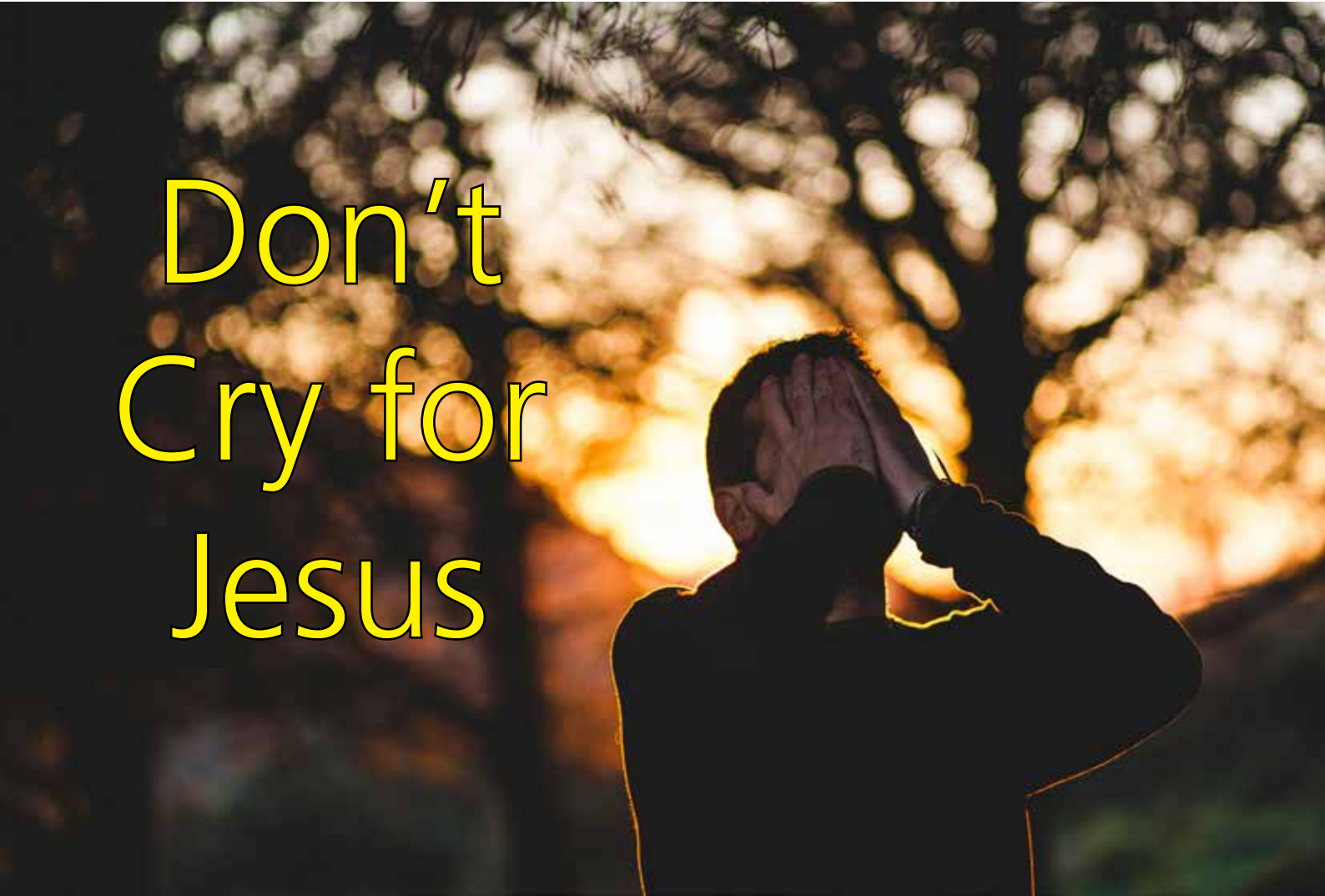
Here is a small gift of \$100.00 for sharing the faith, witnessing, and inspiring articles. Thank you for sending the magazine all these years. I look forward to receiving and reading them. You are doing a great job. I am a 83 year old retiree, living on my own, and counting on God's blessings and goodness each day.

Joyce Mui Subang Jaya

Although THE PLAIN TRUTH is sent free of charge, it is not without cost. Each copy is made possible by the generosity of others. So we are very grateful for those readers who send a donation, and make it possible for us to continue to publish the good news of the Gospel. Donations should be sent to the addresses listed on page 3 or sent electronically to the bank account:

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The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity and space.



Don't Cry for Jesus

“Don't Cry for Jesus” was one of the most memorable sermons I have ever heard. It was given by Dr. Lewis Smedes (1921-2002) at a Fuller Seminary chapel service. I was there as a student during Holy Week in hopes of being better prepared to fully appreciate Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. My prayers were answered that day. I heard a message that has stuck with me ever since.

What was Professor Smedes getting at that struck me as being so profoundly right? He wanted us to see as clearly and precisely as possible that Jesus was no victim and that he didn't want us to pity him or feel sorry for him. I thought at the time, “What? How can we not feel sorry for him, after all he went through for us?” As Smedes developed the message I saw what he meant and how true it was. Professor Smedes had us consider two things: first, the way the story of Jesus is told to us by the New Testament writers and second, a comparison of Jesus with the Greek tragic heroes like the demigod Achilles.

Let me first briefly recount for you the upshot of that comparison. The Greek gods suffered often because of their own immoral activities and those involving the other gods. But their greatest sufferings were tragic because they were due to circumstances beyond their own control. These gods were born with their various

By
Dr. Gary Deddo

strengths and weaknesses. No one of them “had it all.” They were always born into situations not of their own making and often involving jealousies, revenge plots and grabs for power between various other gods.

These tragic heroes were always victims of their circumstances as the inevitable wheel of fate turned against them at some point. It was their vulnerabilities that would lead to their most tragic suffering and defeat, like Achilles' lamentable heel. Were it not for the fact that despite all his armor, Achilles' heel was exposed and that his goddess mother was prevented by his unwitting mortal father from completing the daily rituals that would have made Achilles immortal, Paris' arrow would never have found its fatal target. In some versions of the myth, the god Apollo, for his own reasons, intervened and guided that arrow to pierce Achilles just at that one and only tiny unprotected point. How can you not feel sorry for Achilles? The unfairness of it all. Through no fault of his own, the greatest of all Greek warriors was brought down.

Though we don't think of Jesus as a Greek tragic hero, I realized upon further reflection that his cross is often described in tragic terms. Jesus is often portrayed as a victim of circumstances that go all the way back to the fall of humanity. Jesus is sent to be our Savior because humanity has rebelled and needs to be reconciled and regenerated if we are to share in God's eternal and

triune fellowship and communion and for God's original intention at creation to be realized.

In the New Testament we find Jesus, the Son of God, living at a time when the Jewish nation is occupied by the pagan Romans. Among his own people, the Pharisees and Sadducees are involved in their own disputes with each other. Yet they manage to form an alliance to plot Jesus' arrest and execution. Closer to him, there is a traitor among his own disciples, Judas, who betrays him—with a kiss, no less. Jesus is betrayed first into the hands of the court of the high priests and then into the hands of Pilate, who is himself caught between the rival forces of the Emperor and the potentially riotous crowds. Finally, Jesus suffers the brutally cruel treatment of the Roman soldiers who strip, mock and whip him, then lead him to Golgotha, where he is put to death on the machinery of Roman execution, a cross.

Given these tragic circumstances surrounding Jesus' sacrifice, why should we not consider Jesus a tragic victim? Not because he didn't pay an unimaginably high price for us and our salvation. Not because he didn't actually suffer and die. But simply because he was no victim of those circumstances and because he had no fatal flaw!

The cost of our salvation was foreseen and anticipated before the foundations of the earth were even laid. God was not taken by surprise at the Fall nor by our subsequent need for costly deliverance. But our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, counted the cost (as it were) from all eternity and agreed they were ready and willing to gladly pay the price for our deliverance from evil and for our reconciliation. So the plan for creation was carried out knowing full well the price to be paid to put things right, for God's righteousness to be done.

Jesus knew why he had come and what his saving work would cost. His mission was freely chosen. He was freely sent and freely given by the Father out of their joint abounding love for the world. Jesus repeatedly told his disciples what he would have to go through, even though they could not imagine his being so completely rejected by their religious leaders and political authorities that it would lead to his death. Jesus was anything but unaware or naive about the path he would have to take to make all things new.

Jesus tells us that, like a good shepherd, when danger comes to his sheep, he lays his life down—and also takes it up.¹ Jesus freely, voluntarily, not only gives up his life but also receives it back. When Pilate reminds Jesus that he has the power of life and death over him, Jesus reminds Pilate that he has no power except what has been allowed him by God, his Father.²

In the garden, when one of his disciples takes it upon himself to defend Jesus with a sword, Jesus reminds them that all of his Father's angelic hosts are available to protect him at any moment if he were to call on them.⁴ Jesus is no victim of fate, of circumstances, or of powers greater than himself. He is in charge. He goes forth to Jerusalem only when his hour has come—not sooner, not later.

Jesus' suffering is not the result of any large or small flaw in him. Far from it. There is not even a fleeting shadow of personal weakness evident in his confident exercise of divine omnipotence as he fulfills his redemptive mission. Rather, it is by means of his

strength and authority operating in full concert with his Father that he arrives at the right moment to exert saving power over sin, evil and death itself. His act of self-giving is a work of deliberate might based on the strength of his holy love. Jesus is no tragic hero, but the willing, omnipotent, Lord and Savior.

Perhaps most astonishing are Jesus' words spoken on the way to Golgotha, even as he bore the heavy weight of the cross-beam of his own crucifixion. Seeing the women standing by, no doubt exceedingly distraught and anguished, welling up from the depths of his compassion, Jesus found the strength to tell them something they and we need to know: "Daughters of Jerusalem, *don't weep for me.*"⁴

Jesus does not want us to pity him as a hapless victim who suffers because it couldn't be avoided, because it was inevitable, destined by forces he could not resist. He is not looking for our pity—he trod that road, the Via Dolorosa as it is called, on purpose, by divine design. He intentionally took that journey and nothing, not even torture at the violent hands of human wickedness, could stop him. We may weep for ourselves, if we must, that is, be sorrowful for our sins. But Jesus didn't come looking to gather our tears. Rather, his costly love calls for giving him our thanks, our praise, our gratitude, our love, our absolute trust and loyalty—indeed our very lives in eternal worship.

Jesus not only freely but also gladly gave his life that we might have resurrected life in him. So the author of Hebrews sums it up: "For the joy set before him, he endured the cross." For joy? Yes, for joy. But how can that be? In short, because Jesus was no fool. The price he paid was worth it and he knew it. He has no regrets! He did not enjoy the suffering. Not at all. It was excruciating. But he rejoiced in what he with the Father and Spirit would accomplish by means of his extravagant self-sacrifice. Jesus was no victim but the victor. The surety of his victory gave him a great joy that saw him through his agonies. Crucifixion would lead by the grace and power of God to resurrection and a new heaven and earth.

Jesus was no reluctant Savior, but the conquering Servant-King of all creation. That's the good news that Professor Smedes preached, and from that moment on, I saw that I could no longer think, preach or teach as if Jesus was a victim that we should feel sorry for.

All those illustrations of the cross that I had heard in both liberal and conservative Christian contexts that made it seem that Jesus was a victim, I had to forswear. These made Jesus out to be anything and everything—from a mother rabbit frozen in a blizzard to save her little bunny child, to an innocent toddler run over by a train or ground up in the gears of a drawbridge—all this occurring while his helpless father looks on in horror from a distance. Somehow caught off-guard and facing a horrible dilemma, this father-victim had to choose between his son and humanity. And so he pulls the lever that seals their respective fates. In these illustrations both the Son and the Father are depicted as victims of

circumstances and of their own limitations that call for our pity. As tragic characters they match, if not exceed, the sorry state memorialized in the myth of Achilles.

Perhaps more theological than these misguided analogies are certain interpretations of the cross that pit the Father against the Son. The Father is sometimes said to be taking his wrath out on the Son—punishing him to satisfy his righteousness. In this case, the tragedy occurs between the Father and the Son (some, who have rejected the idea of the cross altogether, have gone so far as to claim that if so, the Father is the victimizer and the Son the victim!). Or the Son is depicted as having to overcome the resistance of the Father to being merciful and forgiving by appealing to his own suffering to gain the Father's pity and so get him to relent of his wrath. From these perspectives, the wills, attitudes and aims of

being, acting for the one and same end: our salvation. The Father sends the Son in the power of the Spirit. The Son freely comes and serves out of love for the Father and with joy in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers the Son to overcome temptation and undo evil itself in order to set free the captives, open the eyes of the blind, set at liberty those who are oppressed and bring in the Lord's promised Jubilee.⁶

At the cross, no exception is made. Our sin is judged and condemned in Jesus. The wrath of God aims to burn away evil and the sin in us that has corrupted our very natures. Dying in him, we are separated and rescued from the evil in us for eternal life. We are given a share in Christ's restored and sanctified humanity. God's wrath serves his mercy. His righteousness serves his love. There is no tension between the attributes of



the Father and the Son are at odds and can be resolved only by the Son's suffering. How tragic! "Only that it wasn't so!" we reply out of pity.

Sometimes we imagine a modern adversarial court scene where the Father is represented as the judge who wants to condemn the guilty party, and Jesus is the defense lawyer hoping to help the defendant avoid the penalty required by the law. Fortunately, Jesus figures out a way to keep us from the punishment we deserve. It's a plan that the Father can't argue with since it doesn't seem to involve any violation of the law. Finding no grounds for objection, the Father-Judge has to concede: Jesus wins the court case for us.

But the biblical revelation shows us the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are of one mind, one purpose, united in

God nor between the Father and the Son. There is no tragic relationship at the heart of the gospel. At the cross the Son "through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished [without flaw] to God."⁷ Our salvation is the united work of the whole Triune God, our Savior—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

At the foot of the cross, Christ doesn't call us to join him in a great pity-party: the Father feeling sorry for the Son, the Son feeling sorry for the Father, Jesus feeling sorry for us and we feeling oh so sorry for him. For Jesus was no tragic victim. Rather, we gather at the foot of the cross to worship in unspeakable awe, with adoration, thanksgiving, praise and prayer for the costly victory of Christ. By his joyful and freely given life, he righteously restored us to fellowship and eternal communion with God our Triune Redeemer.□

- 1 John 10:17
- 2 John 19:10-11
- 3 Matthew 26:53
- 4 Luke 23:28
- 5 Hebrews 12:2
- 6 Luke 4:18-19
- 7 Hebrews 9:14

Like Father, Like Son

There's a great misunderstanding taking place today of major proportions.

Many people believe that God is anything but humble, that he is harsh, uncaring, stern, unrelenting. They believe that you have Jesus here with us, on our side, always pleading for God to show mercy on us defenseless people, and then God the Father is way over there, not on our side. Somewhere in the middle is the 'yes' man, the Holy Spirit; he agrees with both the harsh God the Father and the kind Jesus, also known as God the Son.

Others believe that God the Father, rather than being harsh, stern, and unrelenting, is apathetic. They believe that he doesn't give two hoots in a hailstorm about us, that he's somewhere off on the back 40¹, maybe in Pluto's neighborhood, playing a round of golf with Michael, Gabriel, and to round out a foursome, maybe a fallen angel; and that Jesus is down here with us, holding down the fort.²

What else would explain the horrible events that take place on earth? A caring, compassionate, humble God wouldn't stand by and allow that to happen, they think.

These wrong ideas about God are what turn people off Christianity.

What do we know about God?

Here's the reality: God is *all powerful, all knowing, eternal, compassionate and humble — wait, compassionate and humble?* Most of us don't think of God in that way, but has there ever been a more compassionate and humble man than Jesus Christ?

Here's what we know of Jesus' compassion and humility:

He was God, yet was a child who was chastised by his mom.

He wasn't too busy for little children.

He wasn't too important to obey his mom when the wedding party ran out of wine.

He was rejected in his home town by the Jewish leadership because, "He isn't one of us! This man hasn't received training in the scriptures!" He was rejected by the town folk because,³ "He's one of us! He's just a carpenter!" They all thought, "Who does he think he is?"⁴ Yet, he never said, "How dare they! I'll tell you who I think I am!" Zap!

He healed those who had demons and he healed those who were sick, sometimes disgustingly sick with putrid boils.

By
Sondra Peters

He made house visits! When someone asked him to come heal a sick person, he didn't say, "I'm too busy; you've got to bring him to me." He certainly never said, "Make an appointment!"

He was friends with the tax collector, Samaritan, prostitute, the poor, the meek, the sinner.

He got down on his knees to wash dirty feet.

He forgave rejection; he forgave betrayal.

He was willing to be wrongfully accused, stripped of his clothing, tortured, spit upon, laughed at.

Wait. Are we talking about Jesus or God? Yes. Jesus is God, but let's be more specific. There is one God, and that one God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is called God, the Son Jesus is called God, and the Holy Spirit is called God. All three are eternal, distinct "persons" in one God being. Known as the doctrine of the Trinity, this is the doctrine of God.

All that Jesus did, God the Father did. All that Jesus was, except for his humanity, God the Father was. All that Jesus felt and endured, God the Father felt and endured. God experienced humanity through Jesus.

So, when Jesus felt the nails go through his hands and feet so did the Father and the Holy Spirit. When he felt his flesh ripped to shreds while being flogged, the Father felt it too. When Jesus was manhandled by the Roman soldiers, so was God the Father. When Jesus heard the taunts of shame, so did God. God the Father was stretched out on the cross with Jesus.

God the Father was willing to experience His son's pain for our sake. *We know God the Father, because we know God the Son.*

Their plan reveals their nature

When parents haven't talked to one of their adult children for years, you would say they are estranged. It doesn't matter who was at fault, but all too often it's pride or ego that keeps one or the other from taking the first step to mend the relationship. It takes a big person, a humble person. When it's mended, you would say that they have been reconciled.

When Adam and Eve chose to go their own way, not God's way, they and mankind became estranged from God. Adam and Eve's sin separated or estranged them from God.

But before Adam and Eve's sin even occurred,



God knew of its inevitability and had a plan to mend the future estranged relationship between mankind and God. The plan leaves no doubt as to God's love, humility—His bigness. I can picture God the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit bent over a drafting table. [Okay, so I'm taking a few liberties here!] The Father takes a deep breath, lets it out slowly and says, "We're going to have to fix this. We're going to have to take away those sins, otherwise, they don't stand a chance. Here's the plan."

The plan was for God the Son to become human so that he could remove what caused the estrangement in the first place, sin.

Jesus gave his life for our sins, just as God our Father planned, in order to rescue us from this evil world in which we live. (Galatians 1:4 NLT)

For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 1:9 NLT)

He didn't create us to be perfect! He created us to be loved!

Jesus became human so he understood what being human was like. But God the Father understood it too as did the Holy Spirit. The Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit are on a team—our team. They have done everything that needed to be done for us to reach the goal—the goal of being in God's family for eternity. They have made a huge investment in us. God isn't out to get us. He's on our side! He didn't create us to be perfect. He created us to be loved!

Was Jesus the only one to make the sacrifice?

One of the problems in thinking that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not united in goals, purpose, and love for mankind, that they are not three persons in the one God Being, and that there is no trinity is this:

Sin is breaking God's law. So, if you sin, you need to take it up with God. You're breaking his law, right? It's a problem you have with God (or that He has with you). So, God is the only one who can forgive you. Right? Jesus has nothing to do with this situation. (Remember, this is a false scenario.) The sin is between you and God, and Jesus is over there, an innocent bystander. Yet God volunteers Jesus to die to pay for your sins. In other words, it's no skin off God's nose!⁵ He's not making a sacrifice!⁶ This is wrong on so many levels, because God the Son *did* make the sacrifice and God the Father was right there too.

The Truth about the Father

The doctrine of the Trinity is important precisely because it keeps us from seeing God the Father in a false way—as either harsh or apathetic—and yet, that is how many people do see God.

If you want to know what the Father is like, just look at Jesus, because Jesus is the perfect revelation of the Father. Some of us tend to look for similarities between parents and their children. We'll say, "He has his daddy's eyes," or "she's the spittin' image⁷ of her mama." I've had people look at me, then look at our son. Then they'll narrow their eyes as if squinting will

help them see what's not there, and then proclaim, "He looks like you, Sondra." The truth is, our son has inherited his height and his big feet from me and my side of the family, and that's about it.

Here's what Jesus said about *his* likeness to *his* father,

. . . Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me. Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do. (John 14:9-11 NLT)

Understanding Jesus' nature allows us to see the nature of the Father and Spirit. If they were not each of God, knowing Jesus would not help us understand the Father and Spirit.

We know how the Father feels about us because we know how Jesus feels about us.

God the Father was right in the middle of Jesus' dealings with the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Roman soldiers and he is right in the middle of the messes that take place on earth today. The Father weeps for us, comforts us, loves us.

"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form in a human body." (Colossians 2:9 NLT)

We see the heart, mind, and character of God (the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit) through Jesus' words and actions. The one who heals and the one who weeps at the tomb of Lazarus, the one who groans with pain and agony when he is confronted with deformity, the one who dies upon the cross has to be as fully God as the Father in heaven is. Truly, like Father, like Son. As Jesus is, so is the Father.

¹ "The back 40" refers to a landowner's portion of land that was furthest from the owner's home.

² "Holding down the fort" is American slang for the act of underling being held responsible for tending to the business while the boss is away.

³ Enns, Peter ((2010). *Telling God's Story*. Year One: *Meeting Jesus*. Charles City, Virginia USA: Olive Branch Books. Page 92

⁴ Matthew 13:53-58

⁵ "No skin off his nose" is American slang meaning that the person is not risking anything—someone else is taking the risk.

⁶ Sanders, Fred. *How the Trinity Changes Everything*. <https://www.gci.org/media/videos/how-the-trinity-changes-everything/>. (last accessed September 11, 2018)

⁷ The phrase "spitting image" is used to describe "someone who is so similar to another as to appear to have been spat out of his mouth. That idea, if not the exact phrase, was in circulation by the end of the 17th century, when George Farquhar used it in his comic play *Love and a bottle*, 1689: 'Poor child! he's as like his own dad as if he were spit out of his mouth.'" <https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/spitting-image.html> □



All Hail King JESUS

People in many countries, the U.S. included, seem fascinated with Britain's royals. They enjoy the pomp and ceremony surrounding the Queen and her family. In the U.S., everything the royal family does (marriages, births, even divorces) makes the news. That's a bit ironic, given that Americans are quite adamant about not wanting to be ruled by a king or queen. Perhaps they should rethink that position though, given that Americans (and all the people of the earth) have a king—one whose kingdom is not of this world. We're talking, of course, about King Jesus.

Jesus affirms his kingship

Early in the morning of the day on which he died on the cross, Jesus affirmed his kingship:

Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."¹

Pontius Pilate, Roman governor of Judea, was curious as to why the Jewish religious authorities had brought Jesus before him. Jesus didn't look or act like the other rebels he had seen. And, Jesus' answers bewildered him.

Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."²

By
Sheila Graham

It became clear to Pilate that Jesus was not a dangerous revolutionary. When Jesus said he was born to be a king of some other-worldly kingdom, Pilate probably thought Jesus was a philosopher or eccentric visionary—certainly not a threat to the Roman government. But Jesus was speaking the truth! He truly was (and is) a king! He does have a kingdom!

Old Testament prophesied Jesus' kingship

Jesus' kingship is well established in the prophecies of the Old Testament. The book of Daniel tells of the prophet Daniel's strange visions. Though they are full of symbolism, their message for us is clear: Jesus was destined to be a king.

As I [Daniel] watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.³

Who is this that Daniel sees being enthroned as king? It's a person "like a human being," or "like a son of man." This glorified being, who as king will rule over all the earth forever, is human, yet divine. This person, the only one both fully human and divine, is our Savior. Jesus often referred to himself as "the Son of Man."

But there's more: Israel's King David recorded that God had made a covenant with him. David said it was "an everlasting covenant."

The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land. Is not my house like this with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. Will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire?"⁴

What was this everlasting covenant that God made with David? Note what it says in Psalm 132:

The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: "One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. If your sons keep my covenant and my decrees that I shall teach them, their sons also, forevermore, shall sit on your throne."⁵

Jesus, who was born from David's lineage, will be king.

"There I will cause a horn to sprout up for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one. His enemies I will clothe with disgrace, but on him, his crown will gleam."⁶

The prophecies were true: Jesus was born of David's line in the town of Bethlehem. He was Lord and God in the Old Testament and his kingship was celebrated throughout the Psalms:

The LORD is king, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed, he is girded with strength. He has established the world; it shall never be moved; your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting."⁷

The psalmist declared that the Lord (the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus) is not only king over the world but also its creator, who "established the world."

New Testament affirms Jesus' kingship

Jesus is proclaimed king throughout the Old and New Testaments. We've seen a few of the Old Testament references; let's now look at a prophecy of Jesus' return as king in the book of Revelation. As we do, we must remember that the book of Revelation was written by John to early Christians. Some of it sounds strange to our ears, but the original readers were accustomed to its literary style, called apocalyptic, which is highly symbolic. John likely used this style in order to hide the message of the book from the Roman authorities. That should not be surprising, given that a major purpose of the book is to show that God is sovereign over the governments of the world, the government of Rome in particular. Note this from Revelation 1:4-8:

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Christ is Lord, capital L. Unlike the British royals, who are basically more symbol and tradition than rulers, King Jesus will rule. He is not only a king, he is the King of kings. He will be in charge over all. He will make dramatic changes in this world and how it is run.

Americans fought the Revolutionary War to end the rule of a British king over them. Americans wanted to rule themselves—to choose their own leader. Ever since, Americans have had mixed feelings about kings and queens. Some even feel that the U.S. President should not bow to the royalty of another country.

Be that as it may, the decision has already been made—for Americans, and for people in all countries. Everyone, everywhere already has a king and his name is Jesus. Not only will all people in all nations bow before him, the Bible says all will kneel before him as Lord. When he returns to earth bodily, King Jesus will be recognized as the universal Judge with absolute dominion over everything and everyone.

For us who are disciples of Jesus, that reality is not something we fear or resist. We understand that his rule will bring about welcome change:

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert....

No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.⁸

What a beautiful picture of Jesus' kingdom! Certainly the world has not experienced anything like it on this side of Eden.

To summarize: It's not likely that any of us will meet the Queen of England. But if we ever do, we'll have to endure all sorts of protocol. You don't just go up to the Queen and give her a friendly hug or pat on the back, or even shake her hand. If any handshaking is going to happen, she must first extend her hand to you.

In contrast to how the Queen of England is approached, our King—King Jesus—invites us into a personal relationship with him. He welcomes us with open arms. He treats us like family. Jesus isn't like any ruler, royal or not, that we're familiar with. Our King is a champion of the poor and helpless, the widow and the fatherless. He is our healer and protector. King Jesus is forgiving and merciful. When he ushers in the fullness of his kingdom there will be no more death or sorrow—only joy and gladness, forever. Who wouldn't want that?

All hail King Jesus! Come soon!☑

¹ John 18:33-36

² John 18:37

³ Daniel 7:13-14

⁴ 2 Samuel 23:3-5

⁵ Psalm 132:11-12

⁶ Psalm 132:17-18

⁷ Psalm 93:1-2

⁸ Isaiah 35:5-6; 9-10

Faith th

Scripture tells us that without faith we cannot please God,¹ or be saved.² That means faith is essential for our salvation.

How much faith must we have to be saved – little, much, or perfect?

Bearing God's image and likeness implies we must have his kind (quality) of faith. God's faith is perfect. That means, to be saved, we must have his faith! That's really a really tall order!

Scripture assures that with God, all things are possible, and that includes our salvation. Let's see how this is possible.

Heroes of faith

The book of Hebrews, chapter 11, lists some heroes of faith - Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Joshua. We can also add other names like David, Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. All these heroes endured adversity, tribulations, persecutions and suffering and yet remained faithful to God.

Jesus also praised some for their great faith, e.g., the Centurion who sought Jesus for healing of his servant,³ and the Canaanite woman who sought Jesus for healing her daughter.⁴

People who had little faith

Jesus also met many who had little faith. For example, Jesus chided his disciples, "Where is your faith?" when they were caught in a storm and were terrified,⁵ when they ran out of bread to feed the hungry,⁶ and when they couldn't heal a demon-possessed boy.⁷

When the disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith, Jesus responded, "If you had the mustard-sized faith, you could command the mulberry tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea, it would obey."⁸

When a man sought healing for his son, Jesus said, "If you can believe, all things are possible," and the man responded, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"⁹

Jesus didn't perform many miracles in some cities because of their lack of faith.¹⁰

Just before Peter denied Jesus three times, Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail.¹¹ Although Peter's faith failed temporarily, his faith strengthened after Jesus' death and resurrection. God answered Jesus' prayer for Peter.

Where do we stand?

Do we have the faith of Hebrews 11 heroes? Most of us believe God loves us, has accepted us, has forgiven our sin, and will raise us up on the last day. However, when it comes to things like healing, patching strained relationships, or financial breakthroughs, we do not always have faith that God will answer our prayers.

Yes, our faith wavers – sometimes high, sometimes low. Even those who had great faith like Abraham and Elijah wavered in their faith at times.



By
Dr. P. Sellappan

The truth is whether we have little or much faith, our *faith (important as it is) cannot save us*. Why, because it is never perfect.

As a limited human being, in our fallen world, Jesus exhibited unwavering faith. He trusted God to answer all his prayers – yes, every one of them. Only that kind of faith can save us.

We sometimes ask, "Do I have enough faith in God?" Can we turn the question around and ask, "Does God have faith in us?"

God's faith in humanity

When God created humanity, there was no guarantee they would accept him. If God had no faith in humanity, why did he create them in the first place?

God created humans in his own image and likeness so he could adopt us as his children. God has no suspicion whatsoever of his own image and likeness in us. He has faith that we will accept his love, forgiveness and salvation even if it takes a long time.

But we still haven't answered the question: Why would a *faithful* God place his trust in *faith-less* humanity? The answer is God himself would supply his faith to us!

Jesus' faith as man

Let's take look at Jesus' faith in God, in himself, and in us.

Jesus' faith in God

As man, Jesus trusted his Father completely for everything. For example, he trusted God to deliver him when he was tempted in the wilderness; he trusted God to perform miracles; he trusted God to raise him from the grave.

Jesus repented and was baptised for us. Jesus had faith that God would accept his repentance and baptism on our behalf, and on that basis, we can be confident that God has accepted our repentance and baptism.

Jesus overcame temptations for us in the wilderness and throughout his earthly ministry, and on that basis, we can be confident that we are blameless and righteous before God.

Jesus prayed for us, and on that basis, we can be confident that God answers our prayers. Apostle Paul tells us, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ."¹²

Jesus trusted his Father completely. This he did as a limited, powerless human being, bearing the weight of our sin, in our fallen world. He did that for us, on our behalf, as us.

Jesus' faith in himself

Angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would bear a son who they will name Jesus Christ (which means Savior Anointed). Mary must have told Jesus his identity as he was growing up. Jesus knew he came to save humanity. John the Baptist exclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"¹³

at saves

Jesus had complete faith in himself. He even told the Pharisees, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” He was referring to his own death and resurrection.¹⁴ On another occasion, he told them, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. *I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.* This command I received from my Father.”¹⁵

Jesus' faith in his disciples

While Jesus sometimes chided his disciples for their lack of faith, yet he worked with them patiently, trusting that they would grow in faith. Initially, they had little faith, but their faith surged after Jesus rose from the grave and manifested to them and after they received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The Spirit gave them power and faith to heal diseases, cast out demons, preach the gospel, and endure persecution and suffering.

Christ's faith saves us

Bearing God's image and likeness implies we must have his kind (quality) of faith. Our faith, no matter how strong it is, cannot save us. We need the saving faith of Christ – his perfect unwavering faith that he had worked out for us in his vicarious humanity, on our behalf, as us.

Scripture tells us plainly that it is *Christ's faith* that saves us:

“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but think of yourself with sober judgment, according to *the measure of faith [down payment] God has given you.*”¹⁶

“This righteousness is given through faith in [or *through the faithfulness of*] Jesus Christ to all who believe.”¹⁷

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live *by faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*” (Galatians 2:20)

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the *faith of Christ*, even we have faith in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the *faith of Christ*, and not by the works of the law.”¹⁸

“For it is by grace you have been saved, *through faith*—and this is not from yourselves, *it is the gift of God*—not by works, so that no one can boast.”¹⁹

“In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the *faith of Christ.*”²⁰

Paul declares his status as being “in [Christ], not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the *faith of Christ.*”²¹

Jesus transformed our wavering faith to his perfect faith

Jesus assumed our wavering faith, for example, when he cried out:

“Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”²²

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.”²³

Here, Jesus was echoing our fears and doubts of his love for us.

Jesus assumed our fallen nature [including our lack of faith] and transformed it to his perfect nature, and has given it to us as a gift. This he did through his vicarious humanity, on our behalf, as us.

Paul puts it this way: For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from *[our] faith to [Jesus'] faith*; as it is written, “The just shall live *by his [Jesus'] faith.*”²³

Seated in heaven at the right hand of God, *Jesus still supplies his perfect faith to us, and asks us to participate in his faith. Religion demands faith from us; the Gospel supplies faith to us.*

What about our faith?

Does that mean we don't have to grow in faith? Not at all. While Jesus' faith alone saves us, he exhorts us to appropriate and *participate in his faith*. As we participate in Jesus' faith, our faith grows. Apostle Peter exhorts us to grow in the grace and knowledge [including faith] of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.²⁵ As we grow in his faith, we get to live and experience more and more of God's life.

What Jesus has worked out for us in his vicarious humanity – his perfect faith - is the *objective truth*, which is the basis of our salvation. How we appropriate and participate in his faith through the Holy Spirit is our *subjective personal experience*. He exhorts us to participate in his faith and experience more of his life.

Let's summarize: Our faith, no matter how strong it is, cannot save us. Why, because it is never perfect.

Only Jesus' perfect faith can save us. His faith alone gives us confidence in our calling, justification, sanctification and glorification. He has worked out perfect faith for us in his vicarious humanity, on our behalf, and he invites us to participate in his perfect faith.

Paul echoes this truth thus: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith [the faith of Jesus], one baptism [the baptism of Jesus]; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”²⁶

God has faith in you, not because of your faith in him, but because he supplies his own faith to us through his son Jesus.

Christ's faith alone gives us confidence that our union and communion with God is fait accompli (is a done deal). Let's gladly embrace this gift and participate in his perfect, unwavering faith! □

¹ Hebrews 11:6

² Ephesians 2:8

³ Matthew 8:6

⁴ Matthew 15:22

⁵ Luke 8:25

⁶ Matthew 16:8

⁷ Matthew 17:20

⁸ Luke 17:5-6

⁹ Mark 9:23-24

¹⁰ Matthew 13:58

¹¹ Luke 22:31-32

¹² 2 Corinthians 1:20

¹³ John 1:29

¹⁴ John 2:19

¹⁵ John 10:18

¹⁶ Romans 12:3

¹⁷ Romans 3:22

¹⁸ Galatians 3:22

¹⁹ Ephesians 2:8-9

²⁰ Ephesians 3:12

²¹ Philippians 3:9

²² Luke 22:42

²³ Matthew 27:46

²⁴ Romans 1:17,

²⁵ Habakkuk 2:4

²⁶ 2 Peter 3:18

The Clumsy Dance Pose

My ballet teacher was the immensely talented Russian taskmaster, Ivan Novikoff. An amazing dancer, teacher, choreographer and artist extraordinaire, he knew how to bring out the best in his students. Classes were grueling, bodies ached and muscles cramped; we were taught the show must always go on, regardless of bruised limbs or bloody toes. He demanded perfection, and we did our utmost to live up to his expectations, jumping higher and spinning more times than we ever imagined possible. He knew our physical limitations better than we did ourselves, but he also understood our potential.

I began studying under him at age 4 and was privileged to continue for 13 more years, actually serving as his teaching assistant during my teen years. I graduated at 17 with a teaching certificate from his school, able to confidently perform and teach his signature style. Now, as an adult, I have become a passionate worship dancer and instructor.

My 5-year-old daughter Sydney is a “mini-me,” a little carbon copy of her mother, but with her own distinctive, spit-fire, personality.

When a friend asked me to give ballet lessons to her and her daughter, I agreed, and for the first time, I realized that I would be able to teach my *own* daughter ballet one day. It gave me deep satisfaction to realize I would be able to share a great love of mine with her.

Sweet Sydney was only two years old when I began giving ballet lessons to elementary school students. She came to class and would participate some, sit on my lap some, and then finally decide she’d had enough and simply watch the rest of the class. As she grew older, she grew in stamina, knowledge of dance movements and poise. I was a proud mother and teacher as I watched her first solo performance on stage at age 3 to “I Love You, Lord.”

Now I teach worship dance classes to girls age 3-8, and Sydney is right there in the middle of it all. She loves having me as her teacher, and she mimics my movements. She recently saw a ballet photo of me as a teenager and said she wants to look just like me. She hasn’t yet put in the years of sweat and toil to become an accomplished, graceful dancer, but it’s obvious she’s on her way.

Sydney loves to strike a ballet pose for the camera, but when she poses, she might only get one leg or one arm into the correct ballet position. Her poses are not always pretty, and sometimes her dancing isn’t great, but I know her heart. It is sweet and pure and she’s doing

By
Shiela Miller

her best to dance for God because she loves him and she loves to dance to honor him. That’s exactly what God wants from us, to do our utmost for him—it’s the first great commandment given in Luke 10:27—“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.”

It’s natural for my daughter to want to model her mother, and since we were made in God’s image, we should naturally want to look, act and think like our heavenly Father does. Sydney didn’t get to study with a great ballet master like I did, but I’m her example to follow, as Jesus is our example of the Father. We must emulate Jesus, who said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the

Father.”¹ Wow! Jesus led a perfect life with compassion galore. I don’t know about you, but for me, that’s a hard act to follow. But that is where our standard has been set—absolute perfection. Jesus tells us, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”² We can’t possibly measure up, but he wants to see that we are trying our best to follow him and let him be the Lord and Master of our lives.

Striving for perfection is hard work day after day. My daughter gets utterly exhausted from dancing and wants to collapse before class has even finished. That’s when I encourage her to continue until the end, because the only way to improve is not to give up. Being human, we will always fall short of the perfection we seek, but luckily our creator God knows we’re human, so we shouldn’t be too frustrated with our shortcomings. He sees our hearts and knows our strengths and weaknesses. Our omniscient God is fully aware of our physical limitations, but also of our unlimited potential.

If we let Jesus be our guide and model him as we pose in our dance of life, then we’re allowing him to direct our steps, choreograph our dance and fashion us in his likeness so there will be no mistaking that we’re children of God. Even though we may be clumsy, just like Sydney sometimes is, God is proud of our heartfelt efforts to emulate him. Let’s keep working on the clumsy dance pose! □



¹ John 14:9

² Matthew 5:48

The well of living water

I have enjoyed hiking and backpacking since teenage. After trekking for several hours it is always refreshing to drink some clear, cool water from a sparkling stream. Scientists explain that natural flowing water contains negative ions that energize the body.

We need water to survive. In fact, from ancient times water has been a symbol of life-giving refreshment, irrigation and growth of crops. Just as water is vital to physical life, Scripture uses water as symbolic of something even more energizing—eternal life.¹

Encounters at wells

The main source of water in the ancient Near East was wells. Thirsty people would go to these wells to drink. Women went to wells to draw water for their cooking and washing needs. Herdsmen watered their flocks from these wells.

The Old Testament mentions several wells by name, and gives accounts of men finding their future brides at wells—Isaac’s wife Rebekah was found at a well.² Jacob encountered Rachel at a well³ and Moses met Zipporah at a well.⁴

Jesus met a Samaritan woman at a well and asked her for a drink, commenting, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you *living water*.”⁵ He continued, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”⁶

There is meaningful symbolism in these encounters at wells. People who thirst for spiritual meaning and fulfillment in their lives can go Jesus and ask him for living water—the life-giving power of redemption. Then they enter into an intimate relationship with Jesus (the Bridegroom) and themselves as his bride.

Are you thirsty?

Theologians recognize that all people are born with a “God-shaped hole”—a metaphor for the empty feeling we have that motivates us to seek spiritual meaning in life. Without realizing it, we may go through life trying to fill that inner void by overeating, pleasure seeking, or even worse, with alcohol or drugs—pursuits that yield only temporary satisfaction. Our inner yearning is never filled until we accept Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior. Augustine (354-430 AD) said it well, “You have



By Paul Hailey

made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” C. S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, stated, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in the world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”

Indeed, our Creator has designed you and me to enter another realm—eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Only Jesus can fill your spiritual thirst—the part of you that seeks meaning in life. When you come to him, humbly and sincerely, he will graciously give you “living water”—all that you need to begin your journey to eternal life.

Are you thirsty for spiritual meaning and fulfillment? If so, come to Jesus—he will welcome you with “living water,” and will send the Holy Spirit who gives priceless spiritual understanding.⁷



Come and drink

Jesus invites you to drink the refreshing living water that leads to eternal life. “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost!”⁸ His invitation is free. You can “come” to him when you believe he is who he says he is and by accepting him as your personal Lord and Savior.

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”⁹

Shortly before his death Jesus gave a public invitation to accept him as the true living water by loudly proclaiming, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”¹⁰

Blessed assurance

If you have not yet asked Jesus for his life-giving water, his invitation still stands: “The Spirit and the bride say ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come, and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”¹¹

When you come to Jesus you will learn of his all-encompassing grace, you will be assured of his personal love for you. He will rejoice over you as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, and as I experienced, your whole life will become more abundant and rich with meaning. □

1 Isaiah 12:3

2 Genesis 24

3 Genesis 29

4 Exodus 2

5 John 4:7-10

6 John 4:13, 14

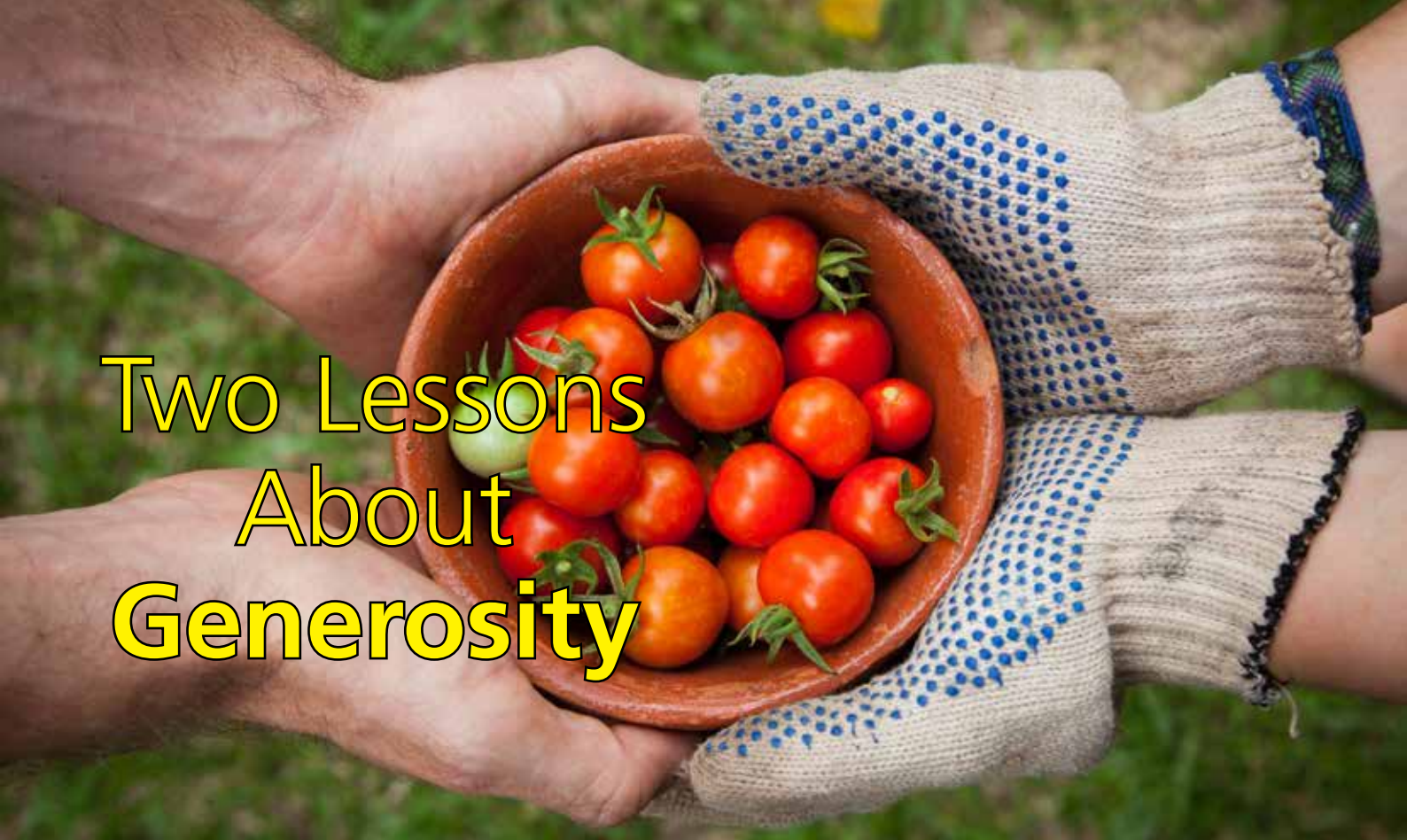
7 1 Corinthians 2:12

8 Isaiah 55:1

9 Matthew 5:6

10 John 7:37, 38

11 Revelation 22:17



Two Lessons About Generosity

Scripture tell stories about generosity. Here are two stories.

The widow at the temple

As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”¹

This passage falls within the section of Mark’s Gospel where Jesus is giving examples of those who reject kingdom values and those who embrace and exemplify them. Ironically, it’s the teachers of the Law who reject them. Rather than exemplifying God’s generosity, they love power, position and wealth. Their lives are about an outward show of religion, not about kingdom values. They devour (gobble up) the property of helpless people, perhaps by continually demanding religious contributions.

Then, in stark contrast to these religious leaders, Jesus tells of an impoverished widow who willingly and gladly gives God the money on which her life depends—she holds back nothing. This sort of radical, selfless generosity exemplifies the generous heart of God, which soon will be seen when Jesus offers himself on the cross as God’s gift to all humanity. In the incarnation and cru-

By
Dr Ted Johnston

cifixion, God gave everything in the person of Jesus. He held back nothing.

The impoverished widow thus mirrors the generosity of God. Though what she gave, monetarily speaking, was insignificant, her actions spoke volumes concerning her heart of generosity. As far as we can tell, she was not being forced to give. The implication is that her generosity was motivated by love for God. She gave in response to what God had done for her. Generous God, generous widow.

Generous God, generous people

True generosity in the lives of God’s people has always been about saying “thanks” to God—their grateful response to God’s great generosity. But what did this widow have to be thankful for? Socially, she was an outcast. Not only was she poor, she was without a husband, and thus was very limited in what she could do in that culture. Yet, she does not seem to consider herself poor. Her actions seem to signify that she saw herself as greatly blessed. She had the gift of life, and lived in the reality that she was a child of God. She responded with generosity.

Look around—look at your life. Has God richly blessed you? Even though times might be tough, and though you may have suffered loss and pain, are there things in your life for which you give God thanks?

Of course there are—you have life, and a relationship with a living, loving, gracious God. You are his child. You are part of this family of faith—a congregation of people who love you and care about you. You have food, clothing and shelter. You are richly blessed.

Giving to God of our treasure through offerings here at church is a tangible way in which we say “thanks!” for the blessings God has poured into our

lives—for the new lives we have in Jesus, for the callings we have received to serve all humanity with Jesus, by the power of the Spirit.

The impoverished widow in this story gave all she had to the Lord. In doing so, she demonstrated her trust that God would provide for her for the next day. We might say that she “put her money where her mouth was.” That’s remarkable, considering the human tendency to worry about not having enough, and so to hold tight to what we have. Make no mistake about it, it was true then and still is true that *being generous is an act of faith*. Through the generous sharing of what God has given us, we are saying that we trust him to provide what we need, and through us to provide for others.

The widow of Zarephath

This sort of generosity was also exemplified by the widow of Zarephath, who we are told about in our Old Testament reading in 1 Kings.

Then the word of the Lord came to [Elijah]: “Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.” So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”

“As surely as the Lord your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”

Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.’ ”

She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.²

Due to a severe drought, the great prophet Elijah was suffering. So God sent him outside Israel’s territory to the Phoenician town of Zarephath and there introduced him to a gentile widow. How ironic that it would be a gentile, a pagan, and a widowed woman at that, who would, with generosity, come to the aid of God’s prophet.

This widow willingly fetched water for Elijah, but when he asked her for some bread, she was forced to admit her abject poverty and state of near-starvation. Elijah reassures her that God will honor her generous hospitality by multiplying the very little that she possesses—a meager supply of flour and oil. The promise is that God will see to it that she has enough to get them through until the drought ends.

Perhaps recognizing him as a prophet, the woman trusts Elijah and obeys, and the truth of Elijah’s words to her were borne out. God kept his promise as a response

to her generosity. Once again, we see the generosity of God himself being reflected in the generosity of a person. This impoverished widow’s generosity to Elijah was a response to the initiative of the generous God. True generosity, you see, is a reflection of God’s goodness to us. Once again, we find the maxim true: *Generous God, generous people*.

Beware a scarcity mentality

Sadly, we live in a *me-centered* culture that has a *scarcity mentality*. It preaches the message: “There’s not enough to go around, so I’d better get more and hold on to what I have.”

This mentality is nothing new, and is not unique to Western culture, for it springs from deep within the fallen human nature we all possess. Sometimes that nature (what Paul calls *the flesh*) raises its ugly head in extreme ways. The Mazatec Indians in Southwest Mexico are an example. By custom, they seldom wish other people well and hesitate to teach others the trades they have mastered. This inhospitable behavior stems from their concept of “limited good”—they believe there is only so much good, so much knowledge, so much love to go around, and so you must hold tight to what you have. For example, they believe that if you teach another person how to bake bread, you will be draining yourself of that knowledge. They even believe that if you love a second child, you will be loving the first one less. To them, if you wish someone well, you are giving away your own happiness and well-being.

A person and even a whole culture that lives according to this scarcity mentality robs themselves of one of the most important keys to happy, successful living: *generosity*. Happiness in life is about *giving*, not *getting*. It’s about open hands, not closed fists. The two widows, though poor, were rich in life due to their generous spirits. From them we learn some important lessons:

1. At its root, generosity is a response to God’s initiative in our life. Occasions for generosity are more than mere opportunities—they are ways God sets us up to share in his generosity. Let’s ask: Where is God calling us to be generous?
2. When it comes to generosity, what’s important is not the *amount* given, but the *proportion*. Both widows gave all, trusting that God would supply their need. What does that sort of trust look like for us?
3. Generosity springs from this trust—the belief (call it faith) that God is indeed generous and will supply our need. Where is it that God is calling us to a deeper level of trust by calling us to be more generous in our giving?

Let us ponder these questions and reflect on these two stories of generous widows. Let us imitate God and grow in his grace and generosity. □

¹ Mark 12:38-44

² Kings 17:8-16

Taste, see and tell



Each of us has a viewpoint concerning God, but is the God we envision the triune God revealed in Jesus? How can we help others to know that God in a deeply personal way? How can we help them respond to King David's invitation in to *Taste and see that the Lord is good*?¹ This is no marketing gimmick—David is referencing the profound truth that God makes himself known to anyone who searches for him. He is inviting us to a robust, life-changing encounter with God—one that engages every dimension of our human existence!

Taste that the Lord is good

Taste? Yes! Experiencing the complete goodness of God is like having delicious food or drink roll over your tongue. Think of rich dark chocolate melting slowly, or perfectly aged red wine pudding on your tongue. Or think of tasting a center cut of tender meat, seasoned with the perfect blend of salt and spice. A similar thing happens when we come to know the God revealed in Jesus. We want the delightful taste of his goodness to linger and last!

Meditating on the richness of the triune God's nature and the complexities of his ways arouses hunger for the things of God. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."² When we come to know God personally, we long for righteousness—for good and right relationships—just like God does. Especially when things are bad, that desire is so intense that it hurts as if we were starving or dying of thirst. We see that intensity in Jesus' ministry to those around him and in his anguish over those who reject God. We see it in his desire to reconcile relationships—especially our relationship with his heavenly Father. Jesus, God's Son, came to give us that good and fulfilling

By
Dr. Greg
Williams

right relationship with God—to share in God's work of making all relationships right. Jesus himself is the bread of life who fills our deep hunger and hope for good and right relationships. *Taste that the Lord is good.*

See that the Lord is good

See? Yes! It is through our sense of sight that we behold beauty and perceive shape, distance, movement and color. Think of how frustrating it is when something we long for is blocked from sight. Think of an avid bird-watcher hearing the sound of a long-sought-for rare species, who is unable to see it. Or the frustration of trying to navigate through an unfamiliar darkened room at night. Then consider this: How can we experience the goodness of a God who is invisible and transcendent? That question reminds me of what Moses, perhaps a bit frustrated, said to God: "Show me your glory," to which God replied: "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you."³

The Hebrew word translated glory is *kabod*. Originally meaning *weight*, it came to be used to refer to the *shining forth* (for all to see and enjoy) of the totality of who God is—all his goodness, holiness and uncompromising faithfulness. As we behold the glory of God, all hiddenness is removed and we see that our triune God truly is good, and that his ways are always right. In the glory of his righteousness and justice, God is committed to making all things right. Our God of peace and life-giving love is opposed to all evil and has guaranteed that evil has no future. In his glory, the triune God shines forth, revealing his essence and presence—the fullness of his merciful and righteous grace. The light of God's glory shines in our darkness and reveals the radiance of his beauty. *See that the Lord is good.*

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The Yin and the Yang of being

More often than not, I find myself telling God how very small I feel. And with good reason I suppose. There are, after all, over seven billion people on the planet today. That's seven billion, who like myself need to eat and drink to stay alive. Who also work and play and struggle and strive and suffer...just like me. On the one hand that means I am not alone. On the other...well it just makes me feel very small.

Sometimes I think that feeling small is not a bad thing.

It helps to keep me humble. It allows me to get some perspective on the happenings in my life so that I don't engage in my own personal pity party about how "no one can possibly understand what I am going through." However, as I stay with the fact that I am still one among billions, it keeps me reminded that in the grand scheme of life I probably am very small.

But then wait a minute. What about those scriptures that

By
Trish Clauson

tell us how very special we are to God? That we are unique and that no one has a story quite like ours. I'd like to think there is something about me that is truly special and unique. But which one is it? Am I small or am I special?

I think I am both. Small and special. Feeling small seems to come naturally. But then there are times when God comes into my smallness and reminds me

that before Him I stand alone, as if I were the only one in this entire universe that matters. When I share my struggles with Him, He doesn't minimize them by reminding me that others are going through the same things too. Instead, He comforts me, encourages me, and loves me as if I am the only person in the world He is taking care of today. He is all mine and I am all His. I am an original...the apple of His eye...His one and only.

So in the end I guess I may be small as I sit among the billions, but before my Savior I am truly special as I sit with Him alone.☐



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An unfolding journey

Coming to know the triune God is not like hurriedly consuming a fast-food meal or casually viewing a three-minute video clip. Coming to know the God revealed in Jesus Christ involves having the blinders stripped from our eyes, and the taste restored to our mouths. It involves being miraculously healed to see and taste God for who he truly is. Our unaided senses are far too weak and damaged to apprehend the fullness and glory of our transcendent, holy God. This healing is a life-long gift and task—a miraculous, unfolding journey of discovery. It's like a lengthy meal that involves the explosion of tastes over multiple courses, with each surpassing the previous one. It's like a compelling mini-series with myriad segments—you can binge-watch it without ever growing tired or bored.

Though an unfolding journey, coming to know the triune God in all his glory has a focal point—what we see and behold in the person of Jesus. As Immanuel (God with us), he is the Lord God become visible and touchable flesh. Jesus became one of us and took up

residence with us. By paying attention to him as he is presented in Scripture, we discover the one who is "full of grace and truth" and we behold the "glory" of "the only Son from the Father."⁴ Although "no one has ever seen God... the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made him known."⁵ To see God as he truly is, we need look no further than the Son!

Go and tell

Psalm 34 paints a picture of the God who is good, just, loving and personal—the God who wants his children to experience his presence and goodness, and who delivers them from evil. It tells of a God who is so real that our lives are forever transformed and our hearts, like Moses, yearn for him and his ways. This is the triune God to whom we introduce our loved ones. As followers of Jesus, we are called to share in our Lord's ministry of evangelism—sharing the gospel (good news) that the Lord truly is a good God.☐

Can we believe the promises of God?

The General Elections where citizens of the country choose their next government or leaders is a time of great promises. Politicians from every political party make attractive promises to sway the people to vote them into office. Many of these promises are extremely attractive especially for those expecting something that benefits them. Only when the elected government comes to power can the people see if the promises made are fulfilled. Often times politicians are reminded of the promises that they have made as those who heard them expect to see the results of those promises. A world famous atheist on a talk show once asked how people could believe the promises made in the Bible as the writings in it are thousands of years old and to believe in a God who still fulfills promises in this modern era is utter foolishness.

To those people who believe in a real God who seeks to have a relationship with them, the word of God is totally believable and many stand by the promises made in the Bible. To them God makes real promises and they seek those promises in their lives. Therefore, one needs to know for sure if the promises made by God are true. The only way to know for sure is if one should see answers to the promises. Otherwise the atheists are right to call believers fools. The fact is that anyone making a promise must have the resources to fulfill it. If someone promises to buy you lunch today, chances are that the person has the financial resources to pay for your meal. We live in a world of broken promises. From broken relational promises, to outlandish political promises, to over-the-top miracle food promises, many of us have become skeptical whenever we hear someone make a claim that appears too good to be true. We can make the assumption that the person making the promises must have the capacity to fulfill them otherwise they are false promises.

In the New Testament of the Bible, Jesus Christ says, "If you have seen Me you have seen the Father".¹ Therefore it is automatically understood that whatever He says or promises must be the promise from God and must be true or our entire faith collapses. A promise is a legally binding declaration that gives the person to whom it is made a right to expect or to claim the performance of a specified act. The words legally binding means that the recipient of the promise has the right to expect. Therefore promises made by Christ are spiritually binding



By
Devaraj Ramoo

because God cannot lie. With this in mind, let's examine the conditions for the promises of God to be fulfilled. Firstly, God's promises go hand in hand with faith. The promises made by God in the Bible are not meant for an unbelieving mind. That is why atheists conclude that believers are fools. The Word of God touches people differently. The same scriptures heard or read may profit some to bring extraordinary changes in their lives while others ridicule them. Faith is the element that makes the difference. In the Gospel of Matthew there is the story of a woman who suffered a condition of blood flow for years. No doctor could heal her. When she saw Jesus she believed that just touching the edge of his garment would heal her, and she was healed instantly. Jesus turned and said to her, "Take heart daughter, your faith has healed you."² Another story relates how two blind men cried out to Jesus for healing. Jesus asked them if they believed he could heal them. They completely believed and were healed to which Jesus said, "According to your faith let it be unto you."³ Therefore, the promises of God can only be fulfilled on those who have a believing mind, and healing is just one example of what God could do in the lives of those who believe.



Another criteria for the promises of God to be fulfilled is to put them in the context of our own lives. Misinterpreting the promises can cause one to be deeply disappointed. In the gospel of John, Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."⁴ Some interpret this as meaning a life of financial wealth and prosperity. True, there are wealthy Christians, but this promise by Jesus has nothing to do with obtaining riches. Many people of great faith were tortured, mocked, imprisoned and killed. Yet they spoke of a deep joy within them for being in Christ was the abundant life they enjoyed. What promise did Jesus give to those who believe that even suffering could not diminish their joy?

It is the promise of eternal life. Jesus promises eternal life and forgiveness from sin to those who believe.⁵ This is a promise that changes our lives. It points to an eternal relationship with the creator, a relationship that no one can take away from us. This is the promise waiting for those who believe. It is a real hope that brings a satisfaction never experienced before. God's promises in Christ are very real. They are indeed waiting for you. □

¹John 14:9

²Matthew 9:22

³Matthew 9:29

⁴John 10:10

⁵John 10: 28-29

Oneing

We must finally go back to the ultimate Christian source for our principle—the central doctrine of the Trinity itself. Yes, God is “One,” just as our Jewish ancestors taught us,¹ and yet the further, more subtle level of meaning is that this *oneness* is actually the radical love union between *three* completely distinct “persons” of the Trinity. The basic principle and problem of “the one and the many” has been overcome in God’s very nature. God is a mystery of relationship, and in its deepest form this relationship is called love. The three are not uniform at all—but quite distinct—and yet completely *oned* in mutual self-emptying and infinite outpouring. God, and all of creation, is a mystery of relationship!

We humans are not autonomous beings either; though we are seemingly separate, we are radically one, too, just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one. We really are created in God’s “image and likeness,” much more than we ever imagined. Trinity is our universal template for the nature of reality and for how to reconcile unity and diversity at every level.

By
Fr. Richard Rohr

We are not seeking some naïve “everything is one”; rather, we seek much more: the deeper “unity of the Spirit which was given us all to drink.”³ We must study, pray, wait, reconcile, and work to achieve true unity—not an impossible uniformity, which was the tragic mistake of both the early notion of Christendom and a later notion of Communism.



Julian of Norwich says, “The love of God creates in us such a *oneing* that when it is truly seen, no person can separate themselves from another person,” and “In the sight of God all humans are oned, and one person is all people and all people are in one person.”

This is not some 21st century flabby fabrication. This is not pantheism (the view that the world is identical to God) or mere New Age optimism. This is the whole point; it was supposed to usher in a “new age”⁴—and it still can, and will.

This is the Perennial Tradition. Our job is not to discover it, but only to retrieve what has been discovered--and lost--and rediscovered again and again by the mystics and seers and prophets.□

¹ Deuteronomy 6:4

² Genesis 1:26f

³ 1 Corinthians 12:13

⁴ Matthew 19:28

Are You a Sinner or a Saint?

I enjoy watching reruns of a TV program from the 1990s, *Quantum Leap*. The lead character, Sam Beckett, jumped into a time travel machine he invented and became stuck in a time loop. While trying to get back to his own time, he leaps to different times and finds himself inside someone’s body. He always finds he is able to help that person, correcting mistakes, preventing disasters and making some kind of difference in their lives before he leaps again. The odd thing is when he looks in the mirror, he doesn’t see himself, he sees the character he is helping.

Who do you see in the mirror? Do you see a sinner or a saint? It seems no matter how hard we try, we still sin. Even the apostle Paul wrote: “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me” (Romans 7:19-20, NKJV).

Yet Romans 8:1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

By
Nancy Silcox

All Christians are saints as Christ lives in them. Galatians 2:20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”

When God looks at us, he sees his Son Jesus who died for us and lives in us. When we look into the spiritual mirror, we should see a Christ-ian, that is, we see Christ. And when others

look at us they should see Christ. We should reflect that light and character to the world around us.

Unlike the character in *Quantum Leap*, when we look into a physical mirror, we see ourselves, warts and all, but this is a false reflection. Unlike the fake news extant today, we need to

declare the true me inside us that the apostle Paul spoke of in Galatians 2:20, Christ in us—our hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). That is who we really are!□

Election, freedom, universalism and hell

This is Part 2 of the series on Dr. Radcliff's book, The Claim of Humanity in Christ. Her book summarizes the incarnational Trinitarian theology of Thomas F. (TF) and James B. (JB) Torrance, particularly in the areas of soteriology (salvation) and sanctification (holiness and Christian living).

In Part 1, we looked at the claim made by Thomas F. (TF) Torrance and James B. (JB) Torrance that God, in and through Jesus Christ, has included all people in his life and love, and that Jesus, in our place and on our behalf, has provided the perfect human response back to God. Embracing this good news liberates us from any effort to try to earn God's grace. It also frees us to follow the Spirit in joyfully participating in what Jesus has done and continues to do on our behalf.

The Torrance doctrine of election: all are included; all is of grace

Key to the Torrances' Christ-centered (incarnational) Trinitarian theology is their understanding that God, in Christ, *has unconditionally elected all humanity*. According to TF, "in Christ we are all judged--and in so far as Christ died for all, then are all dead--but in Him we are all chosen by God's grace." In like manner, JB asserts that "the doctrine of election, interpreted in this Christological way, enshrines the good news that our salvation is by grace alone, and is from beginning to end the one work of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He chose us, not we him. The doctrine of election is another way of saying that all is of grace".

The Torrances' doctrine of election contradicts those articulated by Jacobus Arminius (father of Arminian Theology) and John Calvin (father of Calvinist theology, which developed later into what is called Federal Theology or Covenant Theology). Calvinism and Arminianism, in their own particular ways, *separate election from grace*---a theological viewpoint that TF and JB repudiated in the strongest terms.

Contra Calvinism

The Torrances disagree with the Calvinist (Federal Theology) doctrine of election, which is dependent on the ideas of a *limited atonement and irresistible grace*, which yield the conclusion that God elects only those he predestines to be saved, then extends his saving grace only to the elect who are unable to resist that grace.

Contra Arminianism

The Torrances also disagree with the Arminian doctrine of election, which teaches *conditional election*---the idea that God (in accordance with his foreknowledge of all things) elects only those people he foresees responding in faith and repentance to his offer of salvation.

Both of these doctrines of election (which predominate within much of Protestantism in the West) tend to *separate election and grace*. The result, according to the Torrances, is the loss of any assurance of salvation, resulting in us "being turned back upon ourselves to attempt to achieve it." In contrast, the Torrances' view of election of the whole of humanity in Christ, as noted by Radcliff, "offers us assurance that we are all included in God's love".

By
Ted Johnson

God's sovereignty establishes human freedom

For the Torrances, God's election of all humanity in Christ is an accomplished fact. In and through Christ, God has reconciled to himself all people apart from any action or decision of their own. But what then of human freedom? As Radcliff notes, the Torrance's understanding of universal, unconditional election and reconciliation has been criticized for undermining human freedom.

As Radcliff notes, rather than diminishing human freedom, the Torrances' doctrine of election establishes it. It does so by defining human freedom as "contingent freedom." This freedom, rather than being independent from God, is upheld by God who grants us this freedom as a gift of grace. Contingent freedom deals with the fact that, as fallen humans, we are all slaves to sin (Romans 6) and thus incapable of making decisions that are truly free of that slavery. God solves this dilemma for us by giving us freedom that, rather than overriding our freedom, grants us, in Christ, true human freedom. This freedom, though very real, is contingent upon participating in the life that is ours in Christ.

God has given us this freedom and all aspects of his grace apart from any action or decision of our own. However, when it comes to the grace of contingent freedom, God gives us the freedom to decide either for him or against him---to receive or to reject the grace already given. Radcliff comments:

God's grace is not irresistible [as Federal Theology claims]; we remain free to reject God's grace, inconceivable as this is. But for TF, humanity can only make a free and true decision for God because of God's prior decision for us: "It is WE who believe, and we come to believe in a personal encounter with the living Word. Faith entails a genuine human decision, but at its heart there is a divine decision, which as it were, catches up and makes it what it is, begotten of the Holy Spirit."

Thus, we understand that TF and JB teach that human freedom (understood as contingent freedom), rather than being undermined by God's sovereignty, is established by it.

Is this universalism?

The Torrances have been accused of teaching universalism by insisting on their doctrine of universal and unconditional election and reconciliation. Are the Torrances universalists? The answer is no, as Radcliff notes:

[The criticism that the Torrances' teach universalism] misunderstands the Torrance's scheme of universal atonement. Salvation is not a mere possibility, it is an accomplished reality. As God incarnate, Christ fulfills both sides of the covenant, God's side and our human side on our behalf. This means that our human response to what Christ has already done does not contribute anything to our salvation. Salvation is not dependent upon our human response because Christ has already provided the perfect human response. Our human response can agree and live in accordance with this reality, but it does not accomplish the reality.

There is nothing to prove and nothing to protect. I am who I am and it's enough.

Fr. Richard Rohr

God will meet you where you are in order to take you where He wants you to go.

Tony Evans

The most amazing fact about Jesus, unlike almost any other religious founder, is that he found God in disorder and imperfection—and told us that we must do the same or we would never be content on this earth.

Fr. Richard Rohr

Let's state it clearly: One great idea of the biblical revelation is that God is manifest in the ordinary, in the actual, in the daily, in the now, in the concrete incarnations of life, and not through purity codes and moral achievement contests, which are seldom achieved anyway.

Fr. Richard Rohr

Life is wasted if we do not grasp the glory of the cross, cherish it for the treasure that it is, and cleave to it as the highest price of every pleasure and the deepest comfort in every pain. What was once foolishness to us—a crucified God—must become our wisdom and our power and our only boast in this world.

John Piper

God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.

Augustine

Let God's promises shine on your problems.

Corrie ten Boom

Christ literally walked in our shoes.

Tim Keller

Remember who you are. Don't compromise for anyone, for any reason. You are a child of the Almighty God. Live that truth.

Lysa Terkeurst

If you can't fly, then run, If you can't run, then walk, If you can't walk, then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.

Martin Luther King Jr.

Our greatest fear should not be of failure but of succeeding at things in life that don't really matter.

Francis Chan

God never said that the journey would be easy, but He did say that the arrival would be worthwhile.

Max Lucado

God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supplies.

Hudson Taylor

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The Torrance's doctrine is misconstrued by some as universalism because those making the accusation are succumbing to the use of "human rational constructs of thought," which insist that Christ's death for our salvation must accomplish its intended effect, otherwise God would not be sovereign. Therefore, they reason, the Torrance's doctrine of universal election/atonement must mean that all will be saved. But that is not the reasoning that stands behind the Torrance's doctrine. Instead, they have reasoned in a way that seeks to be fully "faithful to the self-revelation of God in Christ." That revelation speaks of the reality that all humans are united to God through the incarnation of the Son of God (via the hypostatic union that has united divine and human nature in the one person of Jesus). Having been united in this way with God, people are then called, by the Spirit, to participate in that union.

This subsequent work of the Spirit, which involves human response, leaves open the possibility that some people will refuse to participate (see the section on human freedom above). What is universal in the Torrance's scheme is God's love, but that love, according to the Torrance, cannot be equated with universal salvation in the sense of all people participating in the salvation that already is secured for them in the person of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

According to Radcliff, TF rejects universalism because "it does not recognize the urgency of evangelism... [and] the reality of hell and the necessity of mission.... [Moreover] it does not take adequate account of the fundamentally irrational fact of sin."

The reality of hell

Concerning the reality of hell, TF wrote that "If the

light that is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness! To choose our own way and yet in that choice still be chosen by God would be hell". Radcliff comments:

TF believes that God does not send the damned to hell, nor did he create the hell they experience. God loves the whole of humanity everlastingly. It is in rejecting this love that one can experience a hell of one's own creation: "Even when a man has made his bed in hell God's hand of love will continue to grasp him there."

As Radcliff notes, though TF does point to the possibility that all will be saved, he rejects the classic doctrine of universalism "because he cannot point to the impossibility of some being lost".

Where is the logic?

If some reason that the Torrance's embrace of universal election/inclusion/ reconciliation/atonement logically contradicts their rejection of universalism, it is because the reason being used is human logico-causal reasoning, whereas the Torrance reason on the basis of a Trinitarian logic of grace (what TF refers to as "Christo-logic")---the logic of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That means that in their theological reasoning, the Torrance look first to who God reveals himself to be in Jesus (the truth of God's being), in order to understand what God's does for our salvation (the reality of God's acts). In disciplining their reasoning in this way, the Torrance are placing priority on the "who" question over any "how" questions. According to the Torrance, when it comes to who God is and what he has done and is doing for our salvation, human logic must be subordinated to the revelation of these divine realities (and not the other way around).

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