

# THE Plain Truth

MCI (P) 128/05/2016

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Jul - Sep 2016

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

ISSN 1675-3100



9 771675 310008

PP 12578/03/2013 (032108)

# True self vs. false self

Millions go about their lives without knowing their true self! They embrace a false self instead of their true self revealed in Christ. It's time we reject our false self and embrace our true self.

Our false self typically takes the form:

## I am defined by...

It's common for people to identify themselves by their profession, achievements, nationality, ethnicity, family connections and religious and political affiliations. While this may be helpful, they don't define our true identity.

Some see themselves as God's slaves – created solely for carrying out his commands. He can do anything with them or to them.

The truth is God created us in his image and likeness. We have divine origin - we are spiritual, not merely human. We are inseparably connected to him and we live, move, and have our being in him. So our identity is truly in him.

## I am not worthy

Some feel they are useless, especially the jobless, homeless, sick, prisoners, widows, orphans, handicapped, and old folks. They feel they have nothing to contribute. So they see themselves as a burden to others. So they suffer low self-esteem and self-worth.

But that's not true. In God's sight everyone is valuable. He loves everyone and esteems everyone highly. He calls us his precious jewels, treasures and pearls. He calls us royalty, prince and princess. So no one is unworthy in his sight.

## My life is meaningless

Some see their life meaningless. They don't see beyond their daily chores – working, making money, caring for family, participating in activities like browsing the Internet, travelling and sports. They have no idea who they are, or why they are here, or where they are going.

God didn't create us for meaningless existence. He created us to participate in his abundant life and experience his joy, peace, passion, freedom, goodness, creativity and friendship. Not a life of fear, anxiety, pain, sorrow, boredom and death.

## I am alienated from God

Because of sin some think God has left them. They feel guilty, ashamed, condemned, fearful, and alienated from him. So they don't experience intimacy with him.

by  
Dr. P. Sellappan

True we were all sinners once. But Jesus has dealt with our sin once for all. He assumed our sin and destroyed it on the cross. And in his resurrection, he re-created and made us holy and righteous and blameless. That means we don't have to live in fear anymore. We can boldly approach his throne of grace knowing he always loves us.

We may have alienated ourselves from God, but he never alienated us. He has always loved us. He has always been with us. There was not a single moment he was not with us. He is in our joy and in our sorrows. He is with us, around us, and inside our heart. Awareness of this truth can empower us to develop an intimate relationship with him.

## I am schizophrenic

Some see themselves as schizophrenic – as having split personality. They feel they are like Jekyll and Hyde - sometimes positive and confident, sometimes in despair and misery. They see an inner struggle going on inside them, so they are not sure of their true self, who they really are.

Our feelings don't define our identity. Jesus destroyed our false self on the cross, so it simply doesn't exist anymore. So there is only one of us – *our true self*, which is Christ in us. Jesus alluded to this when he told his disciples, "There will be two men sleeping on one bed: one will be taken and the other left;<sup>1</sup> two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left; two women grinding; one will be taken away and the other will be left."<sup>2</sup>

## I am destined to die

Some don't believe there is life after death. So they try to make the most of their life here and now. They pity those whose die young or who are ignored - like the handicapped, the poor, and the abandoned.

The truth is, in Christ, there is a *resurrection life*. God has given us eternal and everlasting life – a life with no regrets, sorrows, pain, boredom, sickness or death. Our present life is only temporary. Jesus has defeated sin and death once for all, so death has no hold on us. Death is not our destiny; eternal and immortal life with God is.

## Embrace your true self

When we reflect God's desire we get to live our true self. When we love, adore, and give ourselves to one another, we experience his kind of life.

Jesus reflected God's desire perfectly on our behalf, and by his Spirit he has placed his desire inside us so we too could reflect his desire and live our true self. □



<sup>1</sup> Luke 17:34  
<sup>2</sup> Mathew 24:40-41

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Issue No. 3	Volume No. 17
July - September 2016	PP 12578/03/2013 (032108)
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Jurong Point Post Office, P.O. Box 054, Singapore 916402

The Plain Truth is published four times a year as funds allow, and is sponsored by Grace Communion International, which is a member of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Malaysia. It follows a non-denominational editorial policy and provides a message of practical help, hope and encouragement from a Christian perspective. - For Non-Muslims Only -

**DONATIONS:** Although we do not put any subscription price for The Plain Truth, we gratefully welcome donations from readers who support our desire to bring spiritual knowledge and understanding to our fellow brothers and sisters. Cheques should be made payable to 'The Plain Truth' and mailed to the postal address listed above.

Printed in Malaysia by:  
Hin Press & Trading Sdn Bhd (71078-D)  
No. PT 45855, Batu 2, Jalan Kapar,  
41400 Klang, Selangor, Malaysia

ISSN 1675-3100. Copyright Grace Communion International, 2016.

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# What our readers say:

I was waiting for my wife yesterday at the Sultan Ismail Hospital...and saw The Plain Truth on the rack. It seems ages I missed out reading your magazine. I read the Daily Bread and pass it on to my brothers and sisters and friends plus foreign workers and they love to read it. I took the email from your magazine and am requesting for a copy. I can pay for it - though not much. Thank you and God bless you and the Plain Truth staff.

**David Yap**  
Johor Baru

*Ed: We are happy to hear that you like our magazine! Sure, we will add your name to our mailing list. While there is no subscription price, we welcome contributions from our readers who wish to support our mission to share the gospel with others.*

This day I have banked into your CIMB account a sum of RM100.00. This is my contribution towards the publication of the Plain Truth magazine. I look forward to receiving your wonderful magazine regularly. Thank you.

**Stanley Yeoh**

*Ed: Thank you for your generous contribution. We appreciate your support and participation in this ministry.*

I have a question: Is the Bible infallible?

**Jayashree**  
Damansara Utama

*Ed: Many Christians believe it is. One of the verses they use to support this is 2 Timothy 3:16. The verse says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." That tells Scripture is a very useful and valuable tool. It can inspire and train us in righteousness and also correct our wrong beliefs and practices. But the verse doesn't say it is infallible. Careful study of Scripture tells us there are still scriptural anomalies. For example: 2 Samuel 24:1 says the Lord caused King David to take the census while 2 Chronicles 21:1 says Satan caused him to take the census. Both verses refer to the same event but they are not consistent. In reading Scripture, we must let the Holy Spirit to interpret it. The Spirit takes precedence over the written word. The Spirit gives life, not the letter (2 Corinthians 3:16). Jesus Christ is the Living Word and the Spirit always echoes his thoughts. Hope this answers your question.*

Each copy of THE PLAIN TRUTH is read by two families of four members each. We are an emotional lot and many of your articles had made us cry. Thank you.

**Royston Leow**  
Singapore

THE PLAIN TRUTH contains numerous articles on all aspects of life. The beauty is that all explanations are made with reference to the creator and how He actually touches our daily lives. The presentation and format is also marvellous.

**Amarjeet Singh Gill**  
Petaling Jaya

THE PLAIN TRUTH is very interesting and touching. I feel that God is always with me and I have more faith in God. There are a lot of things that are very good to read. Thanks a lot. I want to send some donation but I don't know how! I am only a maid here in Singapore. I'm a Filipino. Please give me some information. Thanks.

**Arlene Tiu**  
Singapore

THE PLAIN TRUTH guides me in my daily work and gives me peace and strength to face the unknown in the future. Enclosed is a small token for THE PLAIN TRUTH. Keep up the good work. Thank you.

**Amarjit Kaur**  
Petaling Jaya

The articles give me new perspectives and help me to grow in my bible knowledge. I appreciate the entire team for their dedication and hard work.

**Rajagopal Doraisamy**  
Teluk Intan

THE PLAIN TRUTH is a fantastic publication that I would never want to miss it.

**Ng Sin Kwee**  
Singapore

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps me to understand God's words better. In addition, I enjoy the issues/topics raised in the magazine as most of them are usually intriguing and thought-provoking.

**Samuel Oh**  
Singapore

The Plain Truth is easy to read and understand. It has strengthened my faith. I like to thank all the staff for being so generous in giving it free. The Lord has blessed me through this magazine. It is a wonderful thing to share the Gospel. May God bless your ministry. Please continue the good work. Once again, thank you.

**Ruth Fredrick Arokiam**  
Ipoh

It is a magazine of Christian understanding. We are confused and find it hard to understand why there is so much suffering in this world. The articles explain in great detail why this is so, and in the process, we learn of God's great

love for us, his children.

**Boey Chee Ho**  
Penang

The Plain Truth is a very good magazine. It enhances my faith and helps me in my daily life. It also helps me to find answers to life's most important questions.

**Winne Fam**  
Petaling Jaya

The Plain Truth is really interesting and meaningful. I really appreciate your sacrificial ministry to publish this great magazine. It helps me a lot to overcome this illusive world.

**Salai Lau Jyan Shan**  
Bukit Mertajam

Congratulations. This is the only reading material I read for peace and tranquillity. Every single word is read and pondered over leisurely. As a token of my appreciation, I would like to donate towards the cost of yearly subscription plus the cost for another reader.

**Anonymous**

I am very impressed with the magazine which I used to read from my friend's copy. I wish to have these copies for myself too. Please send the magazine to me. The topics discussed are very relevant to day-to-day issues and it strengthens our faith.

**Mary Vincent**  
Taiping

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:

The Plain Truth  
**A/C No: 8001-8514-59**  
CIMB BANK BHD  
Jalan Dato Hamzah (Branch)  
12-14 Jalan Dato Hamzah  
41700 Klang,  
Selangor, MALAYSIA.

We welcome your comments. Letters for this section should be addressed to:

"Letters to the Editor", The Plain Truth,  
P.O. Box 2043, Pusat Bisnes Bukit Raja, Pos  
Malaysia Bhd., 40800 Shah Alam, Selangor,  
Malaysia.

or sent via electronic mail to:  
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# Behold and become

There is nothing that has the ability to transform our lives as much as how we hear and what we behold. What we hear determines what we see and we become what we behold. Beholding truth makes us true.

by  
Andre Rabe

*But you miss the forest for the trees. These Scriptures are all about me! And here I am, standing right before you, and you aren't willing to receive from me the life you say you want.* <sup>3</sup>

*"That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes; that which we have gazed upon, and our hands handled, concerning the word of life."* <sup>1</sup>

How often still do we hear messages, backed by many scriptural references, filled with formulas and principles yet oblivious to the person – Christ in you. He still desires to find expression, not only in a doctrine or a teaching, however eloquent they may be, but in a person – in you.

Can you see how the tangible experience of God's presence starts with what we hear. There is a natural progression from hearing to seeing to gazing to touching.

This Word is original not invented last week. This Word is eternal, not seasonal. Even before time as

### With what we hear?

The Word John speaks about is not the latest fashionable 'revelation', but rather that which was from the beginning. In Christ, God's original thought was preserved since the beginning. The destiny of this Word was always to become flesh. This Word cannot be contained in books ... not even sacred books. Paul said it this way:



we know it, God made up His mind about us. "... He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world ..." <sup>4</sup> Before we did anything to impress or disappoint Him, He knew us, chose us and uniquely identified us in Christ. Christ came to show us what God originally saw in us, that caused Him to take such interest in us.

*"We, of course, have plenty of wisdom to pass on to you once you get your feet on firm spiritual ground, but it's not popular wisdom, the fashionable wisdom of high-priced experts that will be out-of-date in a year or so. God's wisdom is something mysterious that goes deep into the interior of his purposes. You don't find it lying around on the surface. It's not the latest message, but more like the oldest—what God determined as the way to bring out his best in us, long before we ever arrived on the scene."* <sup>2</sup>

### How we hear

Jesus said: *"Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."* <sup>5</sup> There is a way of hearing that will enrich you greatly and there is a way of hearing that will rob you.

Would you agree that the Word that was in the beginning, that was with God and that was God, was not a book but a person? The truths contained within the scriptures point towards The Truth, which is a person, not a book! In Jesus' days there were many who highly revered the scriptures, yet completely missed its message. Jesus said to the religious scholars of His day:

Prior to this statement Jesus told the parable of the sower to illustrate some of the different

ways of hearing. He likens the Word of God to seed ... seed that is received (heard) in different ways and consequently produces different levels of fruitfulness. I want to liken the progression of hearing, seeing, gazing and touching that I mentioned above to this parable of the sower.

As the sower goes out to sow, some seed falls along the way on a path – it produces no fruit. For me this speaks of casual, careless 'hearing'. The path is not ready for, nor receptive to the seed. I would say that this is a person that never really heard the message.

*"You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you'll find eternal life there."*

Then there is the seed that falls among the rocks. There is a bit of good soil there and so the seed does sprout, but because there is no depth it withers quickly. Often, in the excitement of hearing this gospel, the first response is: what shall I do; how do I apply it? People want to move directly from first hearing this good news to trying to change everything around them. However, it is vital to hear in such a way that what you hear starts changing what you see. Otherwise the excitement might be short lived because as soon as you 'see' a contradiction the whole experience withers. This person is at the hearing stage, but has not heard enough to start seeing.

In each of these illustrations there is a progression in the intensity of 'hearing' and a consequent progression in the fruit it produces. The next example is a person who hears and having some depth, they allow the word to sink in, to change the way they see. Because of this, the seed sprouts and begins to bear fruit. Yet they allow other seed, other words to have an equal place in their lives. This Word is not yet the ultimate word in their lives; it has not captured their exclusive attention yet. Consequently, the seed is not as fruitful as it could be.

"As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience." This is the person who hears and embraces what they hear. This is a way of hearing that captures the person's heart. Embrace this word until you find yourself inescapably embraced by it. The soil does not have to make the seed grow – the seed sprouts and grows of its own accord. The soil simply needs to provide an environment for the seed to remain. Jesus once said: "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you will bear much fruit". 'Abide' does not take much effort. It speaks more of rest than activity.

### What we have seen and gazed upon

As we heed this word, as we give our ears, our attention, we'll begin to see, "which we have seen with our eyes; that which we have gazed upon". John uses two variations of the word 'see'. The first is 'horao'.

Strong's define it as: Properly to stare at, that is, by implication to discern clearly; by extension to attend to.

The second word is 'theomai' and it is a more intensive form of the first word, meaning: A prolonged form of a primary verb; to look closely at, that is, by implication to perceive.

Again the progression is evident. Look until you see beyond the obvious. Look beyond the surface and allow the true meaning of this word to captivate your attention. Continue to gaze and soon you'll find this word becoming a tangible reality.

There is no method, technique or process that has a greater ability to transform our lives than simply gazing into this mystery, seeing in it the face of our birth, allowing our attention to be captivated by it. Let me be clear. When I speak of being transformed, I do not mean becoming something that you are not. This transformation is a restoration to the original.

And all of us, as with unveiled face, continue to behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transformed into His very own image in ever increasing splendour and from one degree of glory to another. <sup>6</sup>

But friends, that's exactly who we are: children of God. And that's only the beginning. Who knows how we'll end up! What we know is that when Christ is openly revealed, we'll see him—and in seeing him, become like him. <sup>7</sup>

Can you see in these how 'transformation' is linked to 'beholding'? Once we start seeing the truth of God's opinion of us and excitement fills our hearts, the first response should simply be one of adoration – let's see more; let's look more deeply, let us gaze upon Him. Such adoration will awaken the appropriate response.

### Doers of the word, not just hearers

"But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his own face in a mirror; for he looks at himself, goes away, and right away forgets what kind of man he was. But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who acts—this person will be blessed in what he does."

The word 'doer' is so much richer than many translations bring across. It's the same word from which we get 'poet', 'poietes', a performer; specifically a "poet" – doer, poet.

It speaks of inspired, passionate expression. When this word is declared as it should be, you'll hear much more than 'dos' and 'don'ts', you'll see the face of your origin as in a mirror. The secret to accurate 'doing' of this word is in accurate 'seeing'. It is the one who looks intently and continues to look, that finds inspired expression – expression birthed from what he sees.

With that in mind I like to translate James 1:25 as follows:

Look and continue to look,  
the perfect, complete, and eternal freedom.  
Listen; listen intensely;  
listen in such a way that it bursts forth in inspired expression.  
Allow what you hear to awaken the poet in you;  
allow what you see to awaken the artist in you.  
Then act; act in the full conviction of what you have seen and heard,  
and you will find delight and affirmation in your action. □

<http://hearhim.net/>

<sup>1</sup> 1 John 1:1  
<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:6-9  
<sup>3</sup> John 5:39-40  
<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 1:4  
<sup>5</sup> Luke 8:18  
<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:18  
<sup>7</sup> 1 John 3:2-3

# A new experience is beckoning

I have never tried to stand in the way of a train at full speed. The fact that you are reading this suggests that neither have you. Time, like a train, is often experienced as an unstoppable and unyielding movement. You either flow with it or you are crushed by it, but never does it yield its momentum to anyone.

In Greek mythology the god Chronos personified this kind of time. Chronos was the brother of Thanatos - a god of death. And what a well suited relationship between that which is temporal and that which passes away!

The way we experience time at sunset is therefore a good way to describe this kind of chronological time. It is a time that signifies the end; time that swallows everything in its way. It is the passing away of the day, the light. This experience of time leaves us trapped in an inescapable cycle in which we grow ever more familiar and ever more bored with what this kind of time has to offer. Chronos moves ever slower and inevitably towards death.

## But there is another kind of time

It is time the way we experience it at sunrise. It is new, fresh and filled with opportunity. Unlike the boring cycles of Chronos, it represents the unknown, the unexpected, possibilities without precedence.

In Greek mythology the god Kairos personified this experience of time. And Kairos was the brother of Zoe - the goddess of life.

So when Jesus says in John 17:3 "this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" the word he uses for life is the Greek word Zoe.

Eternal life therefore has much more to do with the quality of life, the joyful expectation and the grasping of opportunity, than with some endless duration of chronological time.

This experience of time is not one of boring predictability, but one of infinite possibility which has to be grasped and made reality. It is the kind of time in which the God-for-whom-nothing-is-impossible dwells. It is in participating with this God in realizing those possibilities that we partake of eternal life. Eternal life is a life eternally present to God, for in this life, God realized possibilities that were not realized anywhere else.

Eternity is present in this moment. The God of possibility beckons: "You can know Me now. And knowing Me, is knowing the excitement of all I can possibly be through you."

"...the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day." <sup>1</sup> □

by Andre and Mary-Anne



<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 4:18

# Generous God, Generous Life

One of my favorite songs in the late 80s was *Don't Worry Be Happy* in which Bobby McFerrin sings, "In every life we have some trouble... but when you worry you make it double. Don't worry, be happy."

Wouldn't you like to have life free of worry, care, anxiety... just happy? Jesus seems to get at this issue as he talks with a group of his disciples. Hear the word of the Lord:

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or

by  
**Ted and Donna  
Johnston**

The occasion of these words is a conversation Jesus had with a member of a large crowd: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Notice Jesus' reply: "Who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then Jesus seems to address the whole crowd: "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." <sup>2</sup> Jesus knows the human heart and a core part of fallen nature: greed. To illustrate, Jesus<sup>3</sup> tells a parable of a rich farmer who harvested a bumper crop—way more than he could store in his barns—so he decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones, and sit back and enjoy life—living off what he had stored up.<sup>3</sup>



reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Fathers knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." <sup>1</sup>

God' reply was this; "You fool—this very night you'll lose your life. Then what will all you have stored profit you? Then Jesus concludes with this lesson: This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." <sup>4</sup>

Then Jesus pulls his inner circle of disciples aside and says this:

"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes." <sup>5</sup>

I think Jesus' point is that greed and worry often go together, no matter how much one has... Do you agree? Greed and the worry that goes with it is terrible bondage.

Jesus invites his followers to rid themselves of greed and stop worrying about their lives. Is this "pie in the sky" thinking? No—it's reality—a new, liberating freedom grounded on two great truths:

## **God is generous**

Jesus invites us to consider both the ravens and the lilies. <sup>6</sup> Consider what? God's concern and provision for



birds (food) and flowers (clothing). The lesson? God is both able and generous.

And why? Because the birds and flowers deserve it? Earn it?

No, it's all of GRACE! God's unearned, undeserved generosity.

How does this grace apply to you? Hear the words of Jesus:

"How much more valuable you are than birds! If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith."

Knowing and relying on God's superabundant generosity—his grace—comes by FAITH. In this we see the truth of the GOSPEL—the GOOD NEWS that God loves us completely and provides for us fully and abundantly because he loves us and because of what Jesus has done for us.

With these words, Jesus is confronting us with two competing realities:

- That all we have in this world is temporary and seemingly insufficient and we need more of it.
- That God cares for us and has all we need and will provide it for us.

Paul invites us to embrace the second reality—the ultimate reality—when he writes this:

"We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."<sup>7</sup>

We tend toward greed and worry in this life because we are not secure in our standing. But the reality is that by grace, we stand with God—by grace he receives us, unconditionally as his children. And in grace he says to us: "I care for you—don't worry - I'll take care of you."

So the truth is *God is generous*. Do you believe that - really?

Through faith in God we are free to live a generous life.

Worry (anxious care) that flows out of greed is a problem for two reasons:

- It's a big waste of time and energy.

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?<sup>8</sup>

- Worry fills up your life, keeping you from God's best.

Do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.<sup>9</sup>

The kingdom involves the concept of a reign. And Jesus' question is this: *What reigns in your life?* In Romans 5, Paul presents two possibilities: The reign of Adam in death, and the reign of Christ (the last Adam) in life.

We entered Adam's reign at birth, and have spent our lives there scurrying around trying to make a "dead

man walking" look good. When the way of Adam holds sway in your life, you live out of a "scarcity mentality"—where there is never enough, and we scrape and claw to get more and to hold onto it. And we worry.

But by God's grace, we can enter Jesus' reign—Jesus' kingdom—and when we do, we share in his life and the superabundance of his grace and generosity. We can, that is, if we live according to the reality that Jesus truly is Lord of all.

So let me ask: *Is Jesus your Lord?* If so, you are now the recipient of his kingdom on earth, now reigning. And you are invited now to share his reign, through grace, with all its benefits.

And one of the biggest benefits, according to Jesus, is *freedom from worry*—freedom from a scarcity mentality where our vision and passion are limited by what we perceive through our physical senses.

Here's the deal: Jesus' reign in our life, both frees us from... and then frees us to...

- What does it free us *from*? [worry, fear, striving]
- What does it free us *to*? Notice what Jesus mentions:

"Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."<sup>10</sup>

This is ultimate freedom—to rule over our possessions rather than being ruled by them. One of the world's greatest slave masters is *materialism*. People are in slavery to consumer debt, to more automobiles, to bigger homes, more toys. Why? Because they find their significance and purpose in the acquisition of things.

But, if my significance and identity are in Christ—if I am reigning in life with him through the superabundant provision of his grace, then I am truly free: Free to be generous with all I possess. And in this generosity is ultimate happiness. We should change Bobby McFerrin's lyrics: "Don't worry, be generous!" Or, as coach John Wooden was fond of saying, "Happiness begins where selfishness ends."

In Jesus, I know the Triune God of grace who has all resources and is generous to me personally in the granting of those resources. As I focus on that God and his generosity, you know what I can do? I can be a free, open, generous conduit of God's provision for others:

- I am free to sell what I don't need and give it away.
- I can use wisdom to make appropriate provision for my family's future, but I don't have to hoard resources, worrying about future scarcity. Why? I reign in life with Christ.

God has given me the kingdom. And so I'm free to stop worrying, to stop competing with the Joneses—free to stop hoarding and start giving—generously, freely, lavishly. We serve a generous God and now, by his grace, we are set free to live a generous life.

*Generous God—generous life!* Amen. ☐

1 Luke 12:22-34

2 Luke 12:13-15

3 Luke 12:16-21

4 Luke 12:16-21

5 Luke 12:22-23

6 Luke 12:24-27

7 Romans 5:1-2

8 Luke 12:25

9 Luke 12:29-32

10 Luke 12:33-34

# I see Jesus in you



by Jessica Morgan

reason we exist, it took me a while to realize that when I'm enjoying creation, I'm worshipping. It's more than just enjoying a beautiful view; it's realizing a Creator who loves me created the view for my enjoyment. When I think about this, I worship.

I've come to understand that the root of worship is love. Because he loves me, I want to respond in love to him. When I do, I am worshipping. This is what the apostle said in 1 John 4:19, "We love because he first loved us." Love (worship) is our normal reaction. When I love God with my actions and words, I am praising him and pointing my life to him. Francis Chan puts it wonderfully, "Our point in life is to point to him." I want my life to be completely lost in him—this is how I worship. And because my worship is a reflection of my love, my worship becomes visible to those around me. And sometimes that visibility brings out a response, like the customer at the store. Her response reminded me that others notice how I treat them. The way I treat others is not only an aspect of my worship, it is also a reflection of the one I worship. So what I exude by my personality is a form of my worship to God.

## If God is the glue...

Worship is also expressing myself in gratitude to my Saviour. In the life I have been gifted, I continue to try my best to spread his light and learn from him—whether it is reading a devotional and being open to his will, praying with and for people in my life, or connecting with praise song lyrics that refocus my mind on the important parts of life. When I sing or think about praise songs in the car, in my head, at work, while painting and anywhere else in between, I am reflecting the one who gave me life—that is worship.

My worship affects my relationships with others. If God is the glue in my relations, then he is being honored and glorified. My best friend and I almost always pray for each other after we hang out and before we go our separate ways. In looking to God and seeking his will, we are thanking him for our lives and for the relationship we share. Because we know he is part of our relationship, our gratitude for our friendship is worship.

It's amazing how easy it is to worship. When I invite God into my mind, heart and life—and seek his presence in my daily activities and relationships—worship is as simple as choosing to live for him and to live and love others as he lives and loves. I love living a life of worship and knowing God wants to share in my day. I often ask, God, how do you want me to share your love today? In other words, how can I live in worship?

God's plans are far greater than we could ever imagine. He knows all the pieces to our life puzzle; like how a customer's encouraging words echo in my mind to this day, and contributed to my perspective on what a worship-filled life looks like. ☐

I was working one day at my job as a cashier in a sporting goods store, talking and just being friendly with a customer when, before leaving, she turned back to me and said, "I see Jesus in you."

I wasn't quite sure how to respond. Her statement not only warmed my heart, but it got me to thinking: What did she notice? My definition of worship has always been: living a life of love and light for him. I believe Jesus gave me that moment to encourage me to keep living that life of worship and to keep shining bright for him.

I didn't always feel this way. My understanding of worship has developed as I've matured in my faith. As I've grown and served more in the church, I've come to realize that worship is not just singing praise songs and teaching children's church; worship is wholeheartedly living the life God gave me. Worship is my response to God and him living in me.

For example: While I've always believed it is important to walk arm in arm with our Creator, because he is the

# Seeing only Jesus

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. (Mark 9:2-9)

By beginning the story with "Six days later," Mark lifts our expectations for another biblical culmination of glory so often displayed on the seventh day. This beginning also links the story with the Mark's preceding accounts of the blind man who had to be touched twice by Jesus for healing and Peter who only saw partially who Jesus was as the Messiah. There is a fuller revelation of who Jesus is that is put on display in this mountaintop experience.

Peter, James and John had been set apart for this special journey with Jesus. They must have felt privileged to be included in the trek up the mountain. But what awaited them left them in fear—Jesus transfigured with his clothes "dazzling white" along with the appearance of Elijah and Moses. That would be enough to threaten their small "circle of inclusion." Would Jesus move on without them now that two "superstars" had arrived? With his transfiguration can they trust that this is the same Jesus who came up the mountain with them? Maybe they feared being excluded after being so graciously included. Keying off this fear, Peter started running his mouth. He seems to be grasping for inclusion as if he were being left out. He tries to include himself into the experience with, "It is good for us to be here." He also makes the suggestion of building "three dwellings," treating Moses, Elijah and Jesus as equals, in an attempt to prolong the experience. But Peter's senseless talk and clamoring for inclusion are interrupted by a cloud that "overshadowed them" and a voice that spoke directly to them: "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Jesus did not bring them up the mountain just to exclude them. They needed to see a deeper revelation of who he was. They needed to see "only Jesus."

So often we too seek identity in the circles we clamor to get inside of. Whether it be a social circle of friends that makes us feel set apart, or membership in an exclusive club that announces just how special we are. Maybe it's getting into the "right" school, or finding the "right" job. Even churches can lead to endless running

by Lance  
McKinnon



around in circles-within-circles, seeking identity. But like Moses and Elijah, such circles of importance quickly disappear once we find ourselves inside, for they are drawn with imaginary lines. Our true identity, however, is not imaginary at all, for it is found in Jesus and in him alone. He already includes us in the circle of his life which he shares with the Father and the Spirit. As we look to Jesus in faith, we find all the inclusion and identity we will ever need. Our identity in him is the "circle" we were made for, and in no way does the Father intend to exclude us from that.

Mark's story ends with the three disciples once again alone with Jesus. We may have occasional mountaintop experiences with Jesus, but he doesn't stand on the pinnacle looking down on us as we descend back to the valley. He goes with us—walking with us in all aspects of our lives as he works to help us see who he is and who we are in him. No matter what circle we find ourselves in, we look to see only the Son as the Holy Spirit continues to make us into children of the Father. □

# Redefining

**W**hat is desire? It is a strong feeling of wanting to *have* or to *do* something. We are born with it and everyone has it. Desire is what drives and energizes people to action - to achieve goals and acquire things.

## Good and bad desires

Desire can be good or bad. Good desire will naturally produce good outcomes while bad desire will produce bad outcomes.

At its core, desire stems from the posture "I AM loved, adored and valued" or from the posture "I AM NOT loved, adored and valued." If it is from the 'I AM' posture, it will produce positive vibes. If it is from the 'I AM NOT' posture, it will produce negative vibes.

The "I AM" posture comes from God. He wants us to know that we are loved, adored, and valued greatly. He wants us to know that we are sufficient *in him*. The "I AM NOT" posture is our own making - we invented it. It tells us we are not loved, adored, and valued. It tells us we lack many things, we are insufficient.

So what do we desire – for ourselves and others? What does God desire for us? Answering these questions is important as they affect the way we see God, ourselves, and others.

## The original desire

Where did desire originate? What was that desire? And how does it affect us?

Most would agree God is the source of every good and perfect desire. Out of the generosity of his heart he made humans in his image and likeness and included them in his life. He desires that we participate in his life and experience his love, joy, peace, friendship, confidence, freedom, passion, creativity. That is the sole reason why we are here on planet earth.

Humans, by nature, are reflective beings - they reflect or imitate others. Consciously or unconsciously, we reflect the desires of others, whether good or bad. That means we can either reflect God's good desire and live a joyful life or reflect the twisted desires of others around us and live a miserable life. We must choose one or the other.

God *desired* us, so he created us. Not because he *needed* us. There is a huge difference between the two. God's very first act after he made Adam and Eve was: he *blessed* them. *Blessed them* here means: he *loved* them, *adored* them, and *gave* himself to them (like how parents love, adore, and give themselves to their new born babies).

He created them in his image to reflect him, to reflect his desire. He intended this relationship to be reciprocal. As he loved and adored them, he expected them to love and adore him (and thus complete the cycle).



by  
Dr. P. Sellappan

As long as they reflected his desire, their life was blissful. They had no lack – they had everything they needed. There was no competition, strife, jealousy, inferiority complex or insecurity. In short, they lived a heavenly life.

Then something tragic happened and their life went awry.

## Desire gone awry

God revealed to Adam and Eve their identity. He told them they were his children. As a loving Father, he promised to take care of their needs. They simply needed to trust him. Initially, they did and their life was smooth. However, as time went on, their trust waned.



God told them to eat freely from any tree in the Garden (including the Tree of life) except one tree, the Tree of knowledge of good and evil. He told them not to eat from this particular tree as it would lead to death. They understood his instruction.

Then an evil voice challenged them saying, "Who told you are like God? No, you are not! You don't have immortal life. Nor do you have his wisdom and knowledge. You are just dreaming you are like him! He doesn't want you to be like him. He doesn't want any competitor. He wants to reign supreme! That's why he told you not to eat from that tree. That tree has magical power; eating its fruit would make you like God - instantly."

The voice continued, "No worries. Just follow my advice and you will be like God. Go grab the fruit from that tree and eat it and you will become like him - the very thing you are lacking now. And the good news is: it's free. Henceforth you don't have to depend on him anymore!"

It was a high-pitched sales talk. The offer was irresistible. It was better than any get-rich-quick scheme

# our desires

in town. It was an excellent package - it had everything they wanted, with no strings attached! They could now live the God-kind of life *without* God. So they went for it!

Little did they realize that it was a deadly trap – a trap with disastrous consequences! They lost their child-like innocence. Their mind became twisted and depraved. They could no longer think straight. Their perception of God and of themselves changed. They no longer saw God as he really was (as their loving Father and Friend) and they no longer saw themselves as who they really were (as his beloved children). They now saw him as a judge who was waiting to punish them.



In their twisted mind, they *misread* God's desire for them. This produced suspicion, fear, competition and insecurity in their heart. Henceforth their life was going to be hell. The stage was set. It would be a long, wilderness journey until Christ would come and heal and restore their twisted mind to their original innocence and blamelessness. He would remove their blindness and redefine their desire. He would reveal God's true desire for them.

Their story is also our story. Like them, we too have been reflecting one another's twisted desires. Instead of modelling after God - loving, adoring and giving ourselves to one another - we have resorted to lying, stealing, and grabbing. This has produced so much suffering and misery that we see all around us.

## Desire redefined

Just as a bad tree cannot bear good fruits and a salty stream cannot produce sweet water, our twisted desire simply cannot produce the God-kind of life we seek. We have proven this time and again. But don't despair!

God sent his son Jesus 2000 years ago to redefine our desire. Jesus came to reveal God's desire for us -

that we participate in his life and experience his kind of life. Jesus stepped into our confused and darkened world, and from there, he redeemed and restored our twisted desire. He reflected God's desire perfectly as our representative - for us, with us, as us. He loved God and man perfectly. He loved God, adored God, and gave himself to God. And he loved man, adored them, and poured out his life for them. He reflected God's desire perfectly. And by his Spirit he has placed his desire inside us so we too could reflect his desire.

## Live your new desire!

God is all-sufficient. He operates from the 'I AM' posture because that is what he is. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit desire each other, love each other, adore each other and give themselves to each other in joyful celebration of life.

As God's desire is always good, rivalry, strife and violence are totally alien to his being. His desire is that we live as he lives. He destined us to live as he lives (so utterly different from the desires of this world)!

Many still don't know God's goodness. They don't know he has always loved us, adored us, and given himself to us. And he will always love us no matter in what situation we are in, how far we have strayed from him, or how messed up our life right now is. His love is eternal, everlasting and unconditional. And to convince us, he has chosen not to be God *without* us. Jesus is the proof - he has chosen to be *human* forever so we might always abide in him. That is true love.

Since the fall, humanity has been operating from the 'I AM NOT' posture. This posture tells, "God doesn't love me, accept me, like me. He has not blessed me. I am not smart. I am nobody. I have no money, power or worth." This posture drives them to engage in all sorts of undesirable activities just to acquire those things they *think* they lack. They don't realize that in Christ, they have been given all blessings.

Jesus stepped into our darkened world to redeem and restore our twisted desire. As our representative, he assumed our twisted desire and condemned it on the cross. Our twisted desire died with him on the cross. And in his resurrection he has given us his own perfect desire as a free gift. That desire is ours to take and appropriate.

In his incarnation, Jesus has united God and man forever. It's a done deal. We are eternally plugged into him. In him, we have the fullness of life. Let's wake up to this reality and reflect his desire and experience his kind of life as he has always intended for us. □

# Buy One Set One Free



**H**ow do you get ready for the day? We all have our own routines, but I imagine that soap, deodorant, shampoo and toothpaste are part of the picture. It is hard to imagine life without them. But where I work, these common items are luxuries and special treasures.

I work for a rehabilitation facility in Cincinnati. We are a non-profit organization that specializes in the needs of those suffering the effects of domestic violence, addiction, poor mental health and prostitution. Our goal is to get them back on their feet as an active member of the community.

The facility I work with operates in cooperation with the county jail. We offer counseling and help for men, women, teens and children. It is a lockdown facility, in a dorm setting, with Correction Officers on guard on each floor.

## First contact

I am the first person new inmates come into contact with for orientation. I go over policies, procedures, and regulations and let them know what is expected of them. I help them with the mounds of paperwork to sign. As their first contact, I try to remain cheerful and positive in a rather dark and bleak situation.

I work primarily with the women. Through the years I have had the opportunity to meet with women from

by  
**Leanne Wickey**

many different backgrounds. Some definitely belonged in jail and will probably always be a part of the system. But there are also women who are the victims of terrible circumstances. These women are not “born criminals,” and many can be reached and have been reached with great success.

You have probably heard the saying, “You don’t know a person until you walk a mile in their shoes.” Can you truly imagine what it is like to be an innocent 5-9-year-old child and your parents, the only people you know and trust for love and guidance, sell you into prostitution so they can have money for drugs? Even young babies are not safe; parents or “caretakers” allow them to be molested, raped and abused sexually for the pleasure of paying strangers. As a reward for being “good girls,” they are given drugs so that they too become dependent.

## Happening now

I have heard horrific stories that have made me cry out to God to save these lost little girls. I meet girls who have been locked in cages, poked with cattle prods for fun, and brought out to entertain men and women at parties, then thrown back into cages. Yes, this happens. It is *happening*—in America! They may be grown women now, but who was there for them when they needed help the most? Many of them are so broken and shattered mentally, emotionally and spiritually that

without God's help they can never break free from this lifestyle.

But when you are going through this terrible abuse, how can you believe in a God who loves you, and wants to save you, and have you be forever a part of his family? It sounds too good to be true, many have told me. That is why I always try to be an example and a light. My work gives me an opportunity to share little doses of God's love with people who need it so desperately. I find myself learning more about God's love by being with them. We learn to help each other.

### Practical help

The Bible shows us that love is often best expressed in practical ways. Sympathy and encouragement is fine, but maybe what someone who has nothing really needs to help them feel better is a bar of soap and a toothbrush. So I approached my church (Christ Fellowship Church, Cincinnati) with an opportunity to do an outreach for these women. Could we make up small bags of toiletries to give to each woman at orientation? Our congregation responded enthusiastically.

Next, I had to approach the sheriff's department for their approval, because nothing comes into a jail without their approval. We were approved to make up bags containing a regular bar of soap, a toothbrush, a plain style comb (no rat tails, as they can be used as weapons) and trial sizes of shampoo, toothpaste, and deodorants, etc. I went back to church and told them what we could do. We decided to add two more items—a little book called *The Dancing God*, by C. Baxter Kruger, and a small card that the person packing the bag could sign letting the recipient know that they would be praying for them.

So now, when we do our shopping, our congregation adds a few small items to their normal purchases. Every other week we fill 60 bags for the women. Who would have thought a simple gesture like this would have such a great impact? Even the hardest of girls soften when they looked into their bags and see the free gifts. When they find the card and read that someone has prayed for them, many of them just cry. This is my favorite part of orientation. I wish everyone could be a part of witnessing what I see.

### Turning point

That small act of kindness has changed the hearts of many of the girls who have come through the doors of our facility. Some have started praying for the person on their prayer card. Some have asked for permission to put Bible verses and inspirational sayings on the wall. Some even started asking, "How could God love me after everything I have done?"

What a joy it is to let them know that no matter what they've done or who they are, God loves them. He always has and always will. There's nothing they have done in their lives that God cannot forgive. And sometimes all it takes is a tube of toothpaste from a stranger to help them take the first cautious steps towards true freedom.

There are facilities like the one I work in all around the country, so maybe your church could do something like this. Then, as you are shopping for hygiene products for your family, you could add a small gift for a woman in jail.

Buy one—and set one free! ☐

## Comments from girls who have been helped

**Patricia:** "Life on the streets is not a very clean life, and if you get arrested, no one really seems to care that you are not clean, but here they give you a bag of hope. A bag of hygiene supplies, and just being able to feel clean just gives you a whole lot of hope. Thank you."

**Julie:** "I have never been arrested before, and when you feel lost and scared, someone comes along who actually cares, it's like getting a present of nice things, and then you see that someone is actually praying for you, it just made me cry. I will never forget that little bag. I will keep it always to remind me there was hope where I thought I would never find it."

**Sharon:** When asked if I would say something about the hygiene bag, I was thrilled! When I came in, over the weekend, no one was very friendly or seemed to care—I was alone and had nothing. They wanted me to take a shower and I told them I had nothing to take a shower with, where could I get something? They left me on my own. Monday morning when they called me out for orientation, I thought, "Great, what now?" But after meeting one of the nicest ladies leading orientation, I thought there just might be a glimmer of light here. She was very pleasant, non-judging and very concerned for my well-being. Afterwards, she gave me a bag—finally, my shower supplies! There was a book and a card saying that someone was praying for me. God bless the small things!

**Andrea:** In jail, no one cares too much about you unless they want something from you, but at orientation Leanne was so cheerful and funny, for just a moment you forgot where you actually were. When she said her church made these hygiene bags just for us, I waited until everyone left and gave her a hug. I know you're not supposed to do that to staff, but I knew she was different and really cared about my well-being. I will always keep my booklet and my prayer card, because I am praying for my person as well. Thank you. ☐

# Forward with Jesus

In John 21:1-19, we read about a profound encounter Peter had with the risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Together they shared breakfast, and so much more. This encounter occurred after Peter and his companions had returned to their fishing business, thinking that their journey with Jesus was now past. You'll recall that Peter had turned his back on Jesus. Three times he denied knowing him. But now on the beach there was a profound moment of restoration—*it was time to go forward with Jesus*.

You'll recall that Peter first met Jesus in a fishing village. He recognized Jesus as "the real deal," and along with his brother Andrew, and Jesus' cousins James and John, began to follow Jesus. Later, in a profound moment of insight, Peter declared Jesus to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus responded by declaring that "On this rock I will build my church." That was certainly a high point in Peter's life. He rose to prominence among Jesus' band of disciples.

But then came the great low point. The night prior to Jesus' crucifixion, Peter denied Jesus three times.<sup>1</sup> Despite his former closeness to Jesus; despite all the promises; despite the privileged position; Peter showed himself to be abundantly human—a flawed sinner, and here his sin was directed against Jesus.

According to Luke 22:61, at the moment of the third denial, Jesus looked straight into Peter's eyes. Was it a look of anger? Sorrow? As one friend to another? We aren't told. But surely Peter knew, and he was full of sorrow and gut-wrenching shame.

Shortly after his resurrection, Jesus appeared a few times to his disciples, including Peter. Nevertheless, they returned to their secular professions. It appeared that their journey with Jesus was over.

But then came breakfast on the beach. There's obvious symmetry in this scene in John's account with Peter's three-time denial of Jesus. Three times Jesus presses on Peter with this question: Do you love me? Through this encounter, Peter is both restored to fellowship with Jesus and given the vocation that would be the focus of the rest of his life on journey with Jesus in the world—proclaiming the gospel; advancing the kingdom.

This encounter had a profound effect on Peter. The man who had been a prominent disciple only to plunge into the deepest valley of sin and despair, was lifted up by Jesus himself. But there is something else in John's account that often goes unnoticed—namely, the larger implications of how the risen Jesus relates to sinners.

What was it that Jesus was seeking from Peter? I think the answer is honesty. I think a good case can be made that what John is showing his readers is what all people can expect to find when, eventually, they meet our risen Lord Jesus face-to-face. It seems that John is inviting his readers to put themselves in Peter's place, there on the

by  
Brian Carlisle

beach with Jesus.

Can you picture yourself there? Your loved ones? Those who do not yet know and follow Jesus? Even the ones who are actively denying Jesus? How will Jesus relate to these people?

Sadly, many Christians think Jesus will utterly reject those who deny him. But that is not how Jesus related to the great denier Peter. Many commentators struggle with this passage and assume that at some point along the way Peter must have repented. Otherwise how could Jesus receive him in this accepting way? But the text says no such thing. What it does say is that Peter denied Jesus (three times, no less), then cried out in shame, then ran to the tomb, was among those who saw the risen Lord. But then he went back to his fishing business. No mention of repentance; no asking Jesus for forgiveness.

What we see through the lens of our incarnational theology, is that Jesus already had done for Peter (and all humanity) what Peter failed to do. Already Jesus had repented in Peter's place; on his behalf. Already Jesus had asked his Father to forgive Peter. Already Jesus had died for Peter's sin. Already Peter (and all people—sinners all) had died and risen to new life in Jesus.

That being so, Peter's lack of seeking forgiveness and expressing repentance up to that point did not mean that it was "game-over" for him. Not at all. And in the same way, it is not "game-over" for anyone. One day all people will encounter their risen Savior face-to-face. Perhaps Jesus will ask them the same question he asked Peter: "Do you love me?" We are not given the details, but we know who Jesus is and what he has already done. We can count on him to be who he truly is, our Savior.

In Peter's case, his answer to Jesus' question (in the original Greek) was, "Yes, Jesus, you know I love you." Jesus received this honest affirmation and sent Peter on his way to a new life of serving with Jesus in the world—fishing for men instead of fish. Peter was utterly transformed (just read his epistles)!

The Biblical record doesn't present Jesus as concerned with arbitrary time restrictions when it comes to our salvation. Jesus is concerned with human beings—with you and me. He pursues us across all time and space to bring us back to himself, just as he did with Peter. I'm sure Peter would give us this advice about our encounter with Jesus: "Just be honest with him and let him do the talking!"

Through his encounter with Jesus, Peter became utterly convinced of the goodness and grace of God toward him. That is what enabled him to do what he did and to write what he wrote—that as his followers, we should rejoice in sharing in Christ's sufferings.<sup>2</sup> Christ is more precious to us than gold, says Peter. May God help us hear and apply that message. □

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 26:33-35

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 1:6



# The life-giving power of generosity



Some years ago I was watching a television program on the National Geographic channel, which depicted a pygmy tribesman trying to catch a monkey (*you know, the other white meat*) to feed his family. I sat in amazement watching the simple trap he set. He dug a hole in the ground about a foot deep but only a few inches wide. Then he dropped a bunch of peanuts into the hole and walked away.

Sure enough, an hour or so later, a monkey came out of nowhere and inquisitively approached the hole. What happened next astounded me. The monkey reached into the hole, which his hand would barely fit into, grabbed a handful of peanuts and tried to pull his hand out. No matter how hard he tried he couldn't get his hand out because he refused to unlock his fist and let go of the peanuts.

The poor little monkey went into a frenzy, jumping around, screaming and hoping he would somehow get his hand out of the hole without losing his prize. This pitiful scene played out for about 20 minutes until the pygmy returned, only to casually stroll over to the monkey and bonk him on the head with a wooden club. *Bon Appetit!*

The lesson was clear—greed kills. Jesus said this: "Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."<sup>1</sup> In our attempts

by Paul David  
Kurts

at being non-human, we tend to hold tightly to money, time, possessions, you name it. I say *non-human* because to be *truly human* is to be generous with all that we are and all that we have. The Father, Son and Spirit, who embody generosity and whose image we bear, created us with that same generosity. It is there in us, it is who we are, but the problem is we don't always know it, don't always believe it, and so we don't always practice it.

One of the greatest lessons I'm still learning in life is that I can't out-give God. I've tried proving him wrong on this, believe me, only to be proven wrong over and over and over! Not only is the Father continually generous toward the Son and the Son toward the Spirit and the Spirit toward the Father (you get the point), but our Triune God is always generous toward us with all that he is and all that he has. Paul said it this way, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."<sup>2</sup>

So the question is this: who needs to experience your generosity today in a deeper way, or even for the first time? Perhaps a child? A mate? An estranged friend? I believe the saying of our Lord is true: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."<sup>3</sup> We can't help but experience blessing when we exercise generosity. □

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 16:25

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 1:3

<sup>3</sup> Acts 20:35

# Those *dark* times

Doesn't God promise us a blissful, prosperous, long and healthy life? Unfortunately, some popular Christian personalities promote the idea of uninterrupted joy and abundance. But let's face it! God does indeed give us many blessings, but as a loving parent, He also allows us to experience difficulties.

David, in the 23rd Psalm, speaks of not being in want, being led beside quiet waters, and having his soul restored. But he also mentions walking through the valley of the shadow of death. He indeed did experience both extremes—abundant blessings and extreme hardship, even fleeing and hiding to save his life.

## Why difficulties?

You and I are easily distracted from God's ways, slipping into wrong thoughts that tempt us into sin. We are no different from King David who fell into lustful thoughts and sinful actions. God let him reap some painful results from his sins, but he was able to look back and say, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees."<sup>1</sup> We too learn obedience to God's ways when we go through difficulties that we have brought on by our own careless words or actions. As a child my mother warned me to never stick anything into the electrical outlet. Being curious I stuck a silver fork into an outlet. That frightening experience shocked me into realizing I'd better listen to my mother!

Sometimes because we are frail human beings we go through trials that are not of our own making. Like all humanity, we may become ill or injured, or someone may insult or mistreat us. God also uses those difficulties to guide us toward spiritual maturity. James mentions perseverance as an important character trait, something I can personally relate to.<sup>2</sup> When my appendix ruptured years ago, I was bedridden for about three weeks. My pastor visited and commented that I was "learning patience." I didn't appreciate his remark until later! I wanted to get up and do things! But being forced to lay still *did* instill in me a greater degree of patience than I had before. I also learned a little compassion for hurting people.

It seems that some character traits can only be learned the hard way! When we experience dark times, God can use them for our good.

Our loving Father works in our lives to build character. We learn good character traits by making right choices,



by  
Paul Hailey



by refusing to yield to sinful thoughts. We also build character through making mistakes, reaping negative consequences and learning from them.

## Relief will come

Difficulties do come. They are part of life. But we can take comfort in God's promise to never allow us to be tried beyond our ability. "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."<sup>3</sup>

All trials eventually end. If we trust our loving Father, we will be the better for them. "No discipline seems pleasant at the time; but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."<sup>4</sup>

## How we should view difficulties

God is refining us through blessings *and* trials. It can be hard, even perplexing, but we should look upon life's difficulties as opportunities to develop patience, forgiveness, compassion and other godly traits.

The Apostle Paul endured numerous difficulties, including beatings, imprisonment, and shipwreck, but how did he view these experiences? "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."<sup>5</sup>

We can also take heart in knowing that the Lord is with us, intimately involved in shaping us into His image. "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."<sup>6</sup>

This life is temporary. Let's make the most of our blessings *and* our difficulties. "Sing to the Lord, you saints of his; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."<sup>7</sup>

"Blessed (happy) is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.<sup>8</sup> When dark times come, let's face them with faith that our Master Craftsman is doing a good work in us. □

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 119:67, 71

<sup>2</sup> James 1:3, 4

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:13

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 12:11

<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:18

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 12:5, 6

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 30:4, 5

<sup>8</sup> James 1:12

# Be led by the Holy Spirit

As human beings we sometime encounter very difficult times or trials that leave us in grief or a depressed state of mind. This happens when we suffer loss such as when a loved one dies or when facing devastating tragedy or terminal illness. In many hospitals there is a special unit called the hospice care where terminally ill patients are cared for. Here patients are provided compassionate care expressly tailored to meet their individual needs. Those who give this specialized care are well trained to meet the needs of these patients. Their role is to provide the support that they need both physically and emotionally. In normal circumstances, family members and good friends often support us during trying times. Even in schools there are counselors who help students deal with their emotional problems.

Does God provide such a counselor who gives compassionate care and support for our spiritual needs? Indeed there is. He is the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the third person in the Triune God. Sadly, the person and role of the Holy Spirit has been much maligned by many individuals to the extent that some misinformed people even fear the Holy Spirit as some sort of possessing spirit that would take away their freedom and control their minds. This is far from the

truth. To know why the Holy Spirit is important in our lives, we need to see what Jesus Christ himself says about the Spirit because it is he who introduces him in the gospels. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us that if we love him, then we should keep his commandments. In return he would ask the Father to give us a Helper or Comforter who will then stay with us. This comforter is the Spirit of truth who is a special gift from God.<sup>1</sup> This Spirit of God has the quality to help and comfort us and he stays with us as a spiritual counselor who gives us understanding on the things of God.

Jesus further tells us that the role of the Holy Spirit is to teach us all things pertaining to Christ and also to bring to our remembrance everything Christ has said and taught.<sup>2</sup> Jesus also adds that the Spirit will guide us into all truth and will also glorify Him.<sup>3</sup> We can clearly see that everything that Christ states about the Holy



by  
Devaraj Ramoo



Spirit is positive. Simply put, he is a very nice Person to have with us. In the book of Acts we read how the Holy Spirit was actively involved in the preaching of the Gospel. The Spirit guided the apostles as to where exactly they should preach even forbidding apostle Paul from going to certain locations.<sup>4</sup>

But how would the Holy Spirit serve us personally as a Comforter? Well, he leads us through our prayer life. Praying has a unique way of changing and preparing our hearts and minds to hear God's voice. When you pray during your quiet time with God, keep the Bible with you. You will find that as you read verses in the Bible during prayer and speak the word of God, the Holy Spirit will join you as you talk to God. Soon the Holy Spirit will begin comforting and help you deal with all

the situations that you bring to God. He will speak to your heart and help you understand God's will. It will be an enriching experience.

Not only that, the Holy Spirit also gives us a sound mind to understand scripture.<sup>5</sup> A sound mind means a person's total frame of thinking, including his rationale, logic and emotions. Scripture will make wonderful sense to us as we read them. The Spirit will shield us from absurd, ridiculous and unfounded interpretation of scripture and the person of Jesus Christ. You can be sure that there are many hurtful

criticisms, misinterpretations and downright insults hurled against the word of God by certain people. The Holy Spirit helps us see through all these deceptions and understand how God truly operates. Just as Christ was able to see through the scriptural misinterpretations of the Pharisees, you too will be able to see the false notions on scripture intended to manipulate and deceive people.

In short the Holy Spirit serves as our spiritual guard, guide and comforter against all kinds of deceptions, attacks and discouragement that seek to unsettle us in our relationship with God. As we allow our lives to be led by the Holy Spirit we will see beautiful changes in our outlook that reflects the qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.<sup>6</sup> Won't you allow the Holy Spirit to lead you today? ☐

<sup>1</sup> John 14: 15-17

<sup>2</sup> John 14: 26

<sup>3</sup> John 16: 13-14

<sup>4</sup> Acts 16:6

<sup>5</sup> John 16:13

<sup>6</sup> Galatians 5:22

# The ultimate fishing story

Perhaps you remember *Wayne's World* from the TV show *Saturday Night Live*. Comedians Mike Myers (as Wayne Campbell) and Dana Carvey (as Garth Algar) gave tongue-in-cheek compliments by kneeling and waving their arms in mock worship, proclaiming, "We're not worthy!" People today exclaim "I'm not worthy" upon witnessing a particularly amazing feat. When I think of some of the skilled folks I've been blessed to fish with, "I'm not worthy" comes to my mind as well. Of course, some not-so-skilled people tell exaggerated stories about their "epic" fishing trips. But let me tell you two fishing stories that need no exaggeration. The first story is a personal one, about the time I took my son on his first fishing outing. It was a good day. I'll never forget the look on my son's face as he reeled in his first fish. Rather large for a less-than-four-year-old boy, it nearly pulled him out of the boat! When we met some people back on shore, and they realized it was my son's first catch, several jokingly proclaimed, "We're not worthy!"

Quite a fishing story, don't you think? But nothing compared to the second—one I'm sure you know. It's the incident where Jesus directed Simon Peter to a location where he and his companions then hauled in a record catch. Though Simon was the professional fisherman, Jesus gave Simon these instructions:

"Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.<sup>1</sup>

Notice Simon Peter's reaction:

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken.... Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.<sup>2</sup>

Peter's response to Jesus was, in essence, "I'm not worthy." Isn't that how we often feel when encountering God's love and grace? We know we're sinners and there's nothing we can do to make ourselves worthy in



by  
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God's sight. But Jesus' intent is never to push us away, or to shame us, but to help us understand that our worthiness comes not from ourselves, but from him. Jesus makes us worthy.

"But," some might object, "isn't it true that God refuses to be in the presence of sinners?" Though this false idea is held by some, the truth, thank God, is that the Son of God came to live among sinners—to be in their presence, and through his presence to make them worthy. This doesn't mean that Jesus ignores our sin; in fact, he hates it—he hates how it hurts us and distorts and denigrates God's character and God's purposes for us.

The fact that we are sinners does not deter Jesus from seeking us out and fellowshiping with us—drawing us to the Father, in the Spirit. And while it's true that what is "dead in sin" cannot make itself holy, God is both willing and able to make that which is dead, fully alive—to make that which is unholy, truly holy.

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus associated and fellowshiped with sinners, much to the dislike of the Jewish religious leaders of his day: "The Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'"<sup>3</sup> Jesus, who is the ultimate "fisher of men" (and women), rubbed shoulders with the people (sinners all) he intended to "catch," including the Samaritan woman at the well,<sup>4</sup> pictured at right.

The Bible describes more than one miracle of Jesus involving catching fish—you might say that Jesus is the author of the ultimate fishing stories! Unlike fishermen who are famous for exaggerated stories, Jesus has no need to exaggerate. He skillfully gathered in Mary, Martha and Lazarus. He took a group of men who normally would not associate with each other and soon had them "swimming" together. Jesus "caught" those who became his apostles: Peter, Paul and the others. Throughout history he has continued to make stellar catches including former atheists C.S. Lewis and Alister McGrath. And let us not forget how he caught you and me in his net for eternal life!

Though there is nothing you or I can do to make ourselves worthy, we rest assured knowing that God the Father, by his sheer grace, makes us worthy by sharing with us in Christ through the Spirit, his own holiness. Now that's the ultimate fishing story, and it's great good news! □



<sup>1</sup> Luke 5:4-7

<sup>2</sup> Luke 5:8-11

<sup>3</sup> Luke 15:2

<sup>4</sup> John 4:7-29

# Dismissed!



In courtrooms, judges sometimes dismiss charges. When a trial is over, the judge dismisses the jury. In the military, personnel are dismissed. Classes are dismissed for the day or the term. Other than these settings, the word *dismissed* isn't used much. But it occurs on a regular basis when we dismiss others, sometimes overtly and sometimes with a look or just a thought.

For most of human history, anyone thought to be different or inferior for any reason, from being poor to belonging to the wrong tribe or ethnicity, was rejected, passed over or cast aside with little regard for the effects on that person. It's been done intentionally and unintentionally, but either way, being dismissed isn't enjoyable. It makes you feel inferior, unimportant and rejected. Those doing the dismissing can be arrogant, lacking in compassion or just impatient. We've probably all been in both positions at various times in our lives.

Jesus experienced the biggest dismissal of all time when he was unfairly tried and sent to his death on the cross. This wasn't your ordinary, picked-last-for-the-team dismissal or being overlooked because of a perceived lower status. No, this was dismissal taken to the highest degree – it was rejection of God himself.

Jesus knew this would happen. He gave up the glory he had with the Father and became a human being, knowing he would be "despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain."<sup>1</sup>

by  
Tammy Tkach

Unlike us, he was totally secure in his Father's love, knew his purpose and even though he was human, didn't respond to hurt feelings the way we do. When we're rejected, we can lash out, turn inward or do harmful things to ourselves or others.

Of course Jesus felt pain. I'm sure it saddened and hurt him when his family, friends and even the disciples made harsh comments or turned away from him. His rejection by Judas and by extension, all of humanity, hurt him in a way only God can experience. We can't begin to understand it. But we can begin to understand the great love behind the plan for the Son to give himself for us. It was the love that drove him to finish what he and the Father started and the joy that kept him on the cross when his pain-wracked body cried out for rescue.

Jesus was rejected, despised – dismissed – and so are we at times. We have his love, grace and mercy to remind us these minor rejections don't matter. His love reminds us of his acceptance of humanity and that we should dismiss no one, as we are all under the umbrella of his grace. His mercy helps us give mercy to others.

Jesus died to make all the dismissals we give and receive disappear at the culmination of his grand plan of redemption. We will never again have to feel the sting of rejection or be summarily dismissed. We can now and forever bask in his loving acceptance. □

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 53:3

# The Word Made Flesh

John does not start "the story of Jesus" in the usual way. He says nothing about the way Jesus was born. Rather, he takes us back in time to "the beginning." In the beginning, he says, was "the Word." Modern readers may not know at first what this "Word" is, but it becomes clear in verse 14: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." The Word became a human being, a Jewish man named Jesus.

When John talks about "the Word," he is talking about a Person who existed in the beginning with God, and he was God. He was not a created being; rather, it is through him that all created things were made. The question that I'd like to comment on now is, Why does John tell us this? Why do we need to know that Jesus was originally a Person who was not only with God, but he was also God?

## A great idea

By using the word *Word*, John was using a term that had rich meaning to Greek and Jewish philosophers. They also believed that God had created everything through his word, or his wisdom. Since God was a rational being, he always had a word with him. The "word" was his power to think — his rationality, his creativity.

John takes this idea and gives it a radical twist: The Word became flesh. Something in the realm of the perfect and the eternal became part of the imperfect and decaying world. That was a preposterous idea, people might have said. That did not fit their idea of what God was.

John may have agreed with them: This was quite unexpected. God did not act the way we thought he would. Indeed, as we read John's Gospel we will find that Jesus frequently did the unexpected. He was not acting the way that people expected a man of God to act — and that is part of the reason that he came, and part of the reason that John tells the story. We had wrong ideas about God, and Jesus came to set us straight.

Jesus did not just bring a message about God — he himself was the message. He showed us in the flesh what God is like. Shortly before Jesus was killed, Philip asked him, "Lord, show us the Father." And Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you for such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

If you want to know what God is like, then study Jesus. Jesus shows us the love that God has for us; he freely



by  
**Dr. Joseph  
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gave his life to save others. When the Word humbled himself to become a flesh-and-blood human, it was a change — something God had never done before — but it was not a change in God's nature. Rather, it was a demonstration of his unchanging nature — his unchanging faithfulness to us. It showed us the love that God has for us all the time.

The Greek philosophers imagined that God was so perfect that he would have nothing to do with messed-up human beings. Many Jews felt the same way — they emphasized God's holiness so much that they thought the people of God should have nothing to do with people who weren't careful about keeping the laws of holiness. They were right in saying that God was holy, but they had forgotten that his holiness includes love and mercy and his power includes tenderness.

## Life and truth

As a disciple, John did not start off knowing that his teacher was eternally pre-existent. This awareness came to him slowly, and may be reflected in the words of the disciples. Peter said, "You are the Holy One of God"; Martha said, "You are the Christ, the Son of God"; and after the resurrection, Thomas said, "My Lord and my God!"

John develops this theme throughout the Gospel, but he wants us as readers to know even from the beginning who Jesus is, so that we can watch the story unfold with a little more understanding. Jesus is

"God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side" — and he "has made the Father known."

This flesh-and-blood God had life, "and that life was the light of men." He was bringing eternal life, and his "light" reveals to us the way to eternal life. We can read the story knowing that this person is actually God in the flesh, showing us what God is like.

John the Baptist told people about Jesus, but most people could not accept what he said: "Look — the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" But "the darkness" could not understand the light of the world. "The world did not recognize him ... did not receive him." But for those who did believe, John says, they became children of God, born not in the ordinary way, "but born of God."

"We have seen his glory," John says, and it does not

*Continues on pg. 23*



# Sayings by Richard Rohr

*"All great spirituality teaches about letting go of what you don't need and who you are not. Then, when you can get little enough and naked enough and poor enough, you'll find that the little place where you really are is ironically more than enough and is all that you need. At that place, you will have nothing to prove to anybody and nothing to protect.*

*That place is called freedom. It's the freedom of the children of God. Such people can connect with everybody. They don't feel the need to eliminate anybody . . ."*

*"The most common one-liner in the Bible is, "Do not be afraid." Someone counted, and it occurs 365 times."*

*"When you get your, 'Who am I?' question right, all of your, 'What should I do?' questions tend to take care of themselves."*

*"There is no path to peace, but peace itself is the path."*

*"In solitude, at last, we're able to let God define us the way we are always supposed to be defined—by relationship: the I-thou relationship, in relation to a Presence that demands nothing of us but presence itself. Not performance but presence"*

*"When we fail we are merely joining the great parade of humanity that has walked ahead of us and will follow after us."*

*"The cross solved our problem by first revealing our real problem, our universal pattern of scapegoating and sacrificing others. The cross exposes forever the scene of our crime."*

*"The morning glories and the sunflowers turn naturally toward the light, but we have to be taught, it seems."*

*"Life is not a matter of creating a special name*

*for ourselves, but of uncovering the name we have always had."*

*"It is almost impossible to fall in love with majesty, power, or perfection. These make us fearful and co-dependent, but seldom truly loving. On some level, love can only happen between equals, and vulnerability levels the playing field. What Christians believe is that God somehow became our equal when he became the human "Jesus," a name that is, without doubt, the vulnerable name for God."*

*"We have to let go of the passing names by which we have tried to name ourselves and become the "naked self before the naked God." That will always feel like dying, because we are so attached to our passing names and identities. Your bare, undecorated self is already and forever the beloved child of God. When you can rest there, you will begin to share in the universal Christ consciousness, the very "mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16)."*

*"Pope John XXIII's motto might be heard here: "In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, and in all things, charity." That is second-half-of-life, hard-won wisdom."*

*"There are two ways of being a prophet. One is to tell the enslaved that they can be free. It is the difficult path of Moses. The second is to tell those who think they are free that they are in fact enslaved. This is the even more difficult path of Jesus."*

*"Yes, transformation is often more about unlearning than learning, which is why the religious traditions call it "conversion" or "repentance."*

*"Thomas Merton, the American monk, pointed out that we may spend our whole life climbing the ladder of success, only to find when we get to the top that our ladder is leaning against the wrong wall."*

*Continued from pg. 22*

consist of blazing fire and thundering voice. Rather, the glory of God that we see in Jesus is "grace and truth." In his words and in his works, Jesus shows us that truth is gracious. Some people want "truth" to be a weapon that beats other people down, but Jesus shows us that it lifts people up.

"The law was given through Moses," but the law could not give us eternal life. Here's what we really needed: "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Yes, God gave the law, but the law could not reveal the true nature of God. God cannot be defined by a list of rules. He is revealed as a person who walked this earth as one of us, showed mercy to sinners, and died for others.

<sup>1</sup> Exodus 34:6-7

God did not have to do this, but the fact that he did shows how much he cares about us: "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."<sup>1</sup> This had been revealed to Moses, but it seems that the Israelites had forgotten it, so Jesus came to reveal it in the flesh.

Even today, after nearly 2,000 years of Christian teaching, many people — even many Christians — think that God is a stern Judge, but Jesus stepped in and thwarted God's plan to punish us. The truth is that the love and mercy we see in Jesus is exactly how God has always been. That's something worth thinking about. ☐

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