

THE **Plain Truth** ASIA

PP 12578/4/2005

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

June-July 2004

Hope or hype?

p.12

Ever thought of trading-in your life?

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Seven keys to a happy marriage

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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Can you make a difference?

LAST MONTH IN INDIA I met Vinay (not his real name). At the age of 9 he was unceremoniously dumped at the Secunderabad railway station by his uncle and told not to come back! His mother had died several years before and more recently so had his father. Relatives had taken him in for a while but they simply couldn't manage the stress of another child in an already crowded home. So with no home, no parents and no money, he jumped the train heading south.

Vinay got off at the large city terminus and joined hundreds of orphans, homeless, addicts and the discarded of India congregating there. They steal and beg for food. But at least they have a substitute "family", understanding company and for the most part the weather there is kind to the homeless.

It was there that he came in contact with the kindly men from the Prema Seva Sadan (PSS—loosely translated: the Love & Service Organisation), a home for homeless boys, run out of a small two-storey building by a couple of dedicated priests. They approached Vinay at the railway station with an offer of help and care which he accepted. He was taken to join nearly a hundred other boys with a similar background. He was housed, fed, sent to school and trained in a vocation that has opened up a meaningful and productive future career—and the opportunity to marry and support a family. Above all he experienced the love of God expressing itself through His genuine followers and he discovered that there are still plenty of people in this world who really do care. Vinay is one of 500 young people who have been rescued by PSS.

It was a reality check for me. I did not choose where or when I was born. I did not select my family. I could have been Vinay. Hundreds of millions of people in this world over the centuries have experienced a life of deprivation, hardship and oppression—far more than have savoured the relative prosperity most

by
**Rod
Matthews**

of our readers enjoy today. Yet as Christians we have taken on the mighty responsibility of being the living embodiment of a message of love and belonging and rescue and comfort and... well, just total good news. Two thousand years ago Jesus Christ came with a message of hope showing that the ills and evils of this world will come to an end, and while we wait eagerly for Christ's promised return, on a personal level we can conquer them now. Jesus is not physically visible right now. Yet He has said that in the mean time we, Christians, are designated to be the means by which the people of this world experience the practical reality of the presence of Jesus Christ amongst them. If we were to do our best with the skills and talents and opportunities we have been given, can we imagine the impact this would have on the Vinays of the world? And if the world could realise that Christians are not perfect people but incomplete, imperfect people striving to take little steps towards the ideal—the example of Christ—perhaps our often feeble efforts might be better respected.

Sometimes the task before us is daunting—and we wish we had more influence, more resources, greater wisdom and confidence. We wish we could make a "real difference", have more energy and time and impact. (Of course we all probably wish at times, perhaps privately, that *others* would contribute more money, be more involved and reliable so collectively we could accomplish more.)

When Father Pat Birden, supervisor of PSS, was asked if he ever got discouraged about the magnitude of the problem of homeless in Secunderabad, let alone India, he said "I can only do what I can with what is given me". That is all we are accountable for.

Too often we become discouraged because we cannot solve the problem completely,

so we do nothing. We tend to view effectiveness in terms of the visible, widespread impact. There are millions of homeless in places like India, Rwanda, and Afghanistan. Does helping one person like Vinay really accomplish much? Vinay thinks so! So will his future wife and children. How has PSS been able to help over 500 homeless boys become educated, get married, earn a living and lead meaningful lives? By many small contributions of goods and money and service often from people who, themselves, had little to give.

Little things do count. They add up to much. Imagine the scene if every individual leaf in a forest said "I'm too insignificant to add anything to the environment here" and just gave up and died! The forest would become a desert.

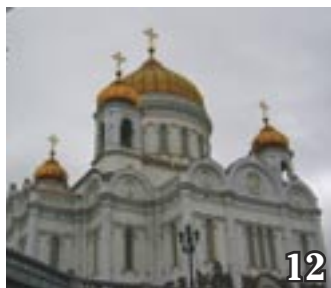
The efforts of many individuals working separately and together can have an immense impact over time. Remember Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi. They all started off influencing a friend for good. And the momentum built.

Christianity is not a philosophy but a way of life. Christians actively and practically follow Jesus Christ. His love and care started with His family and friends and, through those who followed His example, it has reached out to eventually touch people the world over. This is the unique way that God chooses to show how He can change lives and unite peoples.

So let's ask the hard question: are we helping or hindering? Are we reflecting or absorbing? In a world of terror, anger, animosity and selfishness, it is a time for all Christians to demonstrate the better way of love and care and forgiveness to neighbours, community and foreigners. It is our duty because it is also the living expression of the love of God to all peoples. □

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ASIAN EDITION

Managing Editor: Low Mong Chai
Co-ordinator: Susan Low
Advisory Committee: Wong Teck Kong

Wong Mein Kong
Dr. P. Sellappan

Phua Chwee Wan
Devaraj Ramoo

Design: Richard Low

INTERNATIONAL

Editorial Adviser: John Halford
Design Adviser: John D. Stettaford

Christian Media Centre

Malaysia

The Plain Truth, Locked Bag 2002
41990 Klang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia
Website: www.wcg-klang.net
Email: ptasia@myjaring.net

Singapore

Jurong Point Post Office, P.O. Box 054, Singapore 916402

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Joy of living

MANY IN THIS 21ST CENTURY are trying to discover the art of living. In this endeavour they are primarily searching for ways that will make their lives happier. Ironically, a lot of people are happy but not all of them are joyful. What is the difference?

Joy or Happiness?

How is joy distinguished from happiness? Joy is a fundamental characteristic, while happiness tends to be peripheral and temporary. People can be happy at a social gathering or an entertainment parlor. Some seem very happy going shopping. Others find happiness in a pub. But, some will return to their homes still feeling empty. They were happy, but not joyful.

Joy, on the other hand, goes beyond external circumstances. Some can experience joy in spite of adverse situations in life. Joy is experienced not from what one possesses but from what one is. One may not be in a happy situation but he or she can still remain joyful.

I remember meeting a man who was blind. Besides the inconvenience of not being able to see, he had to be dependent on others for transportation. But despite his difficult external circumstance, he always exuded a deep inner joy, a hope and a radiance that wasn't squelched by his adversity.

Joy—not in the abundance of things you have

The biggest mistake many people make is to think that joy comes from material or physical success. In their ignorance they drive themselves to work harder and strive to acquire the latest gadgets. Some try to derive joy with the temporary high that alcohol,



by
**Dan
Zachariah**

illicit drugs or sex can give. They may be happy while the high lasts, but joy eludes them. Their lives may seem full but their hearts are empty.

An ancient king once conducted an experiment. Wanting joy that would last, King Solomon of ancient Israel thought this joy would come by possessing more material goods. So he acquired for himself everything his heart desired. Houses, orchards, gardens, male and female servants, herds and flocks, silver and gold, singers and a well stocked harem! There was nothing more that a 1,000 BC king could want! Now, listen to his conclusion: "Vanity of vanity... everything is meaningless... I have seen all the things that are done



under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 1: 1, 14). He was 'happy' with his possessions but, true joy eluded him.

Three steps to ultimate joy

So, where do we find this joy that eluded even kings? What must we do to experience a joy that will last? The Bible outlines three steps. It seems simple, yet profound enough to revolutionise your life.

1. The first step is not to remain ignorant about the true nature of joy. Joy is a spiritual quality. It is spiritual in nature. It is

the result of one's spiritual quotient, not intelligence quotient. It is not the result of a focus on the material. It is not gained by a lack or an abundance of physical possessions. Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). It is important that we recognise this truth because it is liberating.

2. The second step. If joy is spiritual in nature, it has to come only from a spiritual source. What is this spiritual source? Jesus Christ promises everybody a deep abiding joy. He said to His disciples, "...my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11). Christ is deeply desirous of giving this joy to anyone who truly wants it. In other words, Christ is the true source of joy. How does He give this joy to us?
3. The third step tells us. The Bible reveals that joy is actually the fruit of the Holy Spirit abiding in us. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy..." (Galatians 5:22). The Holy Spirit is ultimately the true source of joy in us. What is the methodology of receiving the Spirit that Jesus Christ is sending? If we believe in Christ, then we need to "repent and be baptised ... and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). We cannot earn joy or manufacture it or manipulate its existence in us through how hard we work or how many gadgets we can amass. It comes through belief in Jesus Christ.

It is in this matrix of our relating with the Father through the love of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit that true joy can be experienced.

May God bless you with the joy of living. □

Not very religious

I'LL REMEMBER THAT NIGHT as long as I live. Family and friends gathered to celebrate our son Mark's 21st birthday party. After presents and applause someone called "Speech! Speech" and he was on his feet. He thanked and acknowledged as a young man would. None of it impacted as much as something he said about his spiritual background.

Eyes level with mine, he expressed sincere gratitude that his parents had not raised him in a "religious household." That might sound like a strange quote for a magazine like this; perhaps more so that as a minister of Jesus Christ I consider it the most profound tribute he could have made to his Christian upbringing.

The key to it all is, of course, in what Mark actually meant by the comment. He grew up in a home permeated with a keen awareness of God. We thanked God in prayer for every meal. We prayed together as a family on important occasions.

In the spirit of the ancient admonition to the people of God (Deuteronomy 6:6-13), we taught the Word of God diligently to our children. We spoke of God and told the stories, at the kids' level, at home, in the car travelling, before sleeping and in the early morning when they piled into bed with Mum and Dad.

Ideal parents? Hardly! We had to negotiate all the same issues as the people we were pastoring. We muddled through many things. But we did believe that the kids should grow up with the Word of God as a Guide to important decision-making; the faithful Arbiter of right and wrong in a world devoid of absolutes.

Our kids learned to recognise blessings from God and to thank Him for them. We were (still are) a family, despite our many shortcomings, that takes pleasure in thanking God for His goodness.

So why did our son describe his upbringing as "not religious"?

Why should his father, a minister, take such encouragement from such a statement, made publicly?

Because what he said signalled the answer to a prayer I made before he was even conceived. In essence, this was how it went:

"Father, we have decided it's time to have our first child. So many children grow up in the Christian world with a distorted perception of You. Religion has become another component of a very busy life, rather than simply *being* life itself. It's become



by
Kerry Gubb



institutionalised—cluttered and complicated by churches."

"The simple relationship You seek with us Your children is so often convoluted with doctrine and theology, dogma and prejudice. Father, should You bless us with children, we want to rear them into a relationship with You—not with any church—including even this fellowship. Help us to point them to You and Your Word, rather than the literature and liturgy of any church. Help us always to emphasize substance over form with them."

"Help us to clear away the clutter

of our own lives, leaving only the nurture and admonition of God for our children."

Sounds larger than life, doesn't it? Sometimes it was! We certainly can't claim the perfect score; what parent can?

But on his 21st birthday, our son, unprompted, verified the hope that went into that prayer.

"Not religious" wasn't a reference to God. Mark had grown up with God; no question about that. He'd simply made it to adulthood without many of the complications young people in "religious" families find such a turn-off. What a pity that so many come out of adolescence with a jaded view of God, based on the multitude of ways He is misrepresented by well-meaning but misguided Christian parents.

There is much about life in general and childrearing in particular, which are cause for regret. So this isn't about being a perfect parent. It's just a reflection on what matters most when you're rearing Christian kids. Jesus Christ is above churches. Denominations were invented by men. Our Father in Heaven doesn't belong to one!

Our son Mark is unashamedly a disciple of the Master, a relationship sealed in baptism. He's committed to continuing the walk with God he's had all his life. Yet he's most definitely not a 'religious' person! He's a regular fellow with none of the pious baggage that makes so many Christians so unpleasant to be around for the average person.

He chooses to worship with a particular fellowship. That's consistent with the Word. His spiritual walk is with, and his heart and soul belong, however, not to any denomination or organisation of men, but to His Father in Heaven.

And that's very gratifying to his father on earth. □

Prayer: A cry for help

SOME PEOPLE MAKE PRAYER sound like a duty, as a work that faithful Christians must perform. Some make it sound as if we ought to pray seven times a day, or three times a day, or all night long, or rise before dawn, or spend at least two hours every day, following the example of this or that famous person.

I think Christians should pray not as a duty, but out of *need*. After all, prayers are requests. There are no biblical commands for us to pray at certain times or in certain ways. We are not told to follow Jesus' example in praying all night, or Daniel's example of facing Jerusalem.

But Scripture everywhere assumes that God's people *do* pray. We are not told to pray for specific amounts of time, but *all* the time (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18). We are not told to kneel or stand or lie on the floor when we pray. Rather, we are told to do everything while praying (Philippians 4:6).

Why so much prayer?

Prayer is, in its simplest sense, a request. The most common Hebrew and Greek words for prayer mean "ask". Whenever we ask God for anything, we are praying—and it is right that we ask. Paul told the Philippians to ask for whatever they wanted (Philippians 4:6).

That is why we should pray: We are to ask God for the things we need. The better we know ourselves, the more we will know that we are incredibly needy people. Of ourselves, we can do nothing. If we want to accomplish anything worthwhile, we must seek God's help. We must depend on Him. Prayer is a cry for help. And since our needs never end, our prayers should never cease.

Rely on God

Self-reliance is sin. It is arrogant for us tiny creatures to think that we can do whatever we want, that we can control our own destinies, that we can decide for ourselves what is right and what is wrong. The truth is that human beings do not have

by
**Joseph
Tkach**

the wisdom or the power. The universe exists only because Christ is upholding it by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). We exist only because our Creator supplies our needs (Acts 14:17).

Yet (I speak from experience) even believers sometimes forget about our minute-by-minute need for God, and we may go through the day with scarcely a thought, scarcely a thanks for what God is doing for us. He is upholding us even as we ignore Him.

Even when we face problems, we sometimes struggle on and on, trying to solve the problems with our own strength, with our own strategies, instead of realising that needs and desires should be shared with God in prayer (Philippians 4:6). We act as if everything depends on us, when everything actually depends on God. He knows our needs, and He wants us to trust Him.

Thankfully, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, especially when we are too unthinking to ask for ourselves (Romans 8:26–27). The Holy Spirit stands in the gap and helps us in ways that we do not know. So when we fail to pray constantly, the Holy Spirit steps in. Even so, we cannot turn all prayer over to the Holy Spirit and let Him do all the talking while we go through life unawares.

We *need* to pray. We will be happier, less stressed, more fulfilled, if we keep in mind that we live in the presence of God, that in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). The more we are aware of God, the better our understanding of life will be, for God is the frame of reference that we need. When we see life in His context, we see it accurately.

God is not a genie who grants our every wish. That is because often we do not understand what we really need. We may pray for escape from a trial, but God is using that trial to teach us something far more important than temporary comfort. We may pray

for a neighbour to come to Christ (and we *should* have that desire), but God knows this may not be the right time. God may want *us* to be more involved in the person's life.

Frankly, there are so many things wrong with this world that we should have many desires, for ourselves, for our churches and for this world. We have much to pray about.

Prayer is our cry for help. In prayer, we admit that we are not self-sufficient, that we cannot handle everything on our own. In prayer, we acknowledge a relationship between God and us, a relationship in which God has promised to provide our needs and to bless us in ways He knows are best. Prayer is an act of worship, because it acknowledges that God has power and that He is dependable.

Thanks

God supplies our needs, and it is appropriate for us to thank Him for doing so. Every breath we take is a gift from Him. All the beauty in nature is a gift from Him. The wonderful variety of sights, sounds, smells and textures is a gift from Him. Our conversations with God should include thanks as well as requests. This is a form of praise, to acknowledge that He is the giver of every good thing.

As we thank God, we remind ourselves of our place in the universe—a place of great honour as a target of God's affection, and a place of dependence on His graciousness. Giving thanks is a way to know who we are and why we exist; it reminds us that the universe functions only through His gift.

Some may say: "I already know that. Why do I have to keep saying it?" I think it is only through saying it that we are really mindful of it; it is too easy for us to go through the day without really being aware that life functions best if we remember it as a gift. This is supported by the biblical commands for us to be



thankful, and continually to give thanks to God in our prayers (1 Thessalonians 5:17–18).

The Bible similarly tells us to pray with persistence, giving the same request again and again. We know by faith that God heard us the first time, and that He knows our earnestness even without our persistence, so I conclude that His command for our persistence is really for our own good. We need to tell ourselves again and again what are the desires of our heart.

This does not mean that prayer is just a means of talking to ourselves, or of reminding ourselves of abstract truths. No, Scripture assures us that prayer is a genuine conversation with God. Our requests really go to heaven, and are really heard and answered by God. Our thanks really go to God; we must see Him in the picture. Often, it is in prayer where God speaks to us, when we grow in our understanding of what He wants us to think or do.

We have never-ending thanks for what God does for us day to day, thanks for the promises He has made for our future, and thanks for what He has already done in Christ to ensure that future. Our thankfulness for Jesus Christ turns naturally to dedicating ourselves to doing God's will. We eagerly want to respond with faithful allegiance to One who loves us so much.

Our existence, our joy, our pleasures, our sanity, are all dependent on God's day-to-day favour toward us through Jesus Christ. We have much to be thankful for—indeed, everything we have and ever hope to have is a gift for which we need to be thankful.

Our thanks should include our appreciation for who God is, and here our prayers blend thanks and praise. We exalt His power, His wisdom, His mercy, the beauty of His love. We praise Him for who He is, not just for what He gives us, for in reality, He gives us Himself.

My cry for help

Finally, my friends, I ask you to pray for your local church. It takes God's strength for your congregation to make a difference for the kingdom in your community. You need divine help to work together and to tackle the impossible. You need to pray. Pray for your local leaders, too. Those who lead worship music need divine blessing. Those who speak should speak the words of God (1 Peter 4:11), and this cannot be done from human wisdom.

And pray for me, too. Even the most talented human beings could not do the work God sets before me. I need divine help, and I pray for it, and I receive it. And just as Paul asked his churches to pray for him (Colossians 4:2–3, etc.), I ask you to pray for me, too. The difficulties I face personally, and the difficulties I face in serving the church, mean that I need God's help. We all need help. We all need prayer. ☐

Joseph Tkach is the Pastor General of The Worldwide Church of God

Let the little c

RECENTLY WHILE WAITING for a friend on a bustling city street, I observed a couple of street boys milling around. One boy was fondly playing with his pet white mouse that was faithfully clinging to him—perhaps the most trusted friend he had, I thought. The other boy was a victim of polio, crippled and able only to move by crawling on all fours. People, probably accustomed to the familiarity of street children, passed by seemingly not to notice. Eventually, somebody noticed and gave the boys a little food and drink which was eagerly accepted.

by
**Daphne
Sidney**

It made me wonder what Jesus would do if He was there. Would He have seen two ragged little street boys, or would He have seen two little boys of great value and potential for the future? We don't have to look far in God's Word, the Bible, to discover how Jesus affirmed His love and appreciation for children.

Look at the story of the epileptic boy which is recounted three times in the New Testament. Here is a story of a boy who suffered so much. Not only was he an epileptic, he was also deaf and

possessed by an evil spirit who would throw him into water and fire at times. Imagine the pain and isolation such a child would feel. He could not hear a word nor speak. His was a silent and lonely world. What parent would allow their child to play with him? Imagine the teasing and mocking he must have endured as he was growing up. The disciples tried to help but could not. But there was Jesus responding to the father's plea. "Sir, have mercy on my son..." (Matthew 17:15). And Jesus healed him. Mark's account further details



children come

how Jesus took the boy's hand and helped him to rise and stand up after his healing. Spiritual healing and warm physical touch. It means a lot to a child to be held by the hand. After all the years of isolation, how much it must have meant to the boy to be held by the trusted, warm and secure hand of Jesus. Jesus restored his worth and dignity and welcomed him back to normal childhood.

Jesus and little children

Matthew also recounts Jesus blessing little children. While His disciples were busy scolding the people for bringing these little 'intruders', Jesus was ready to give them His blessing. Jesus noticed them and said: "Let the children come to me and do not stop them..." (Matthew 19:14). The kind hands of Jesus touched the children before He moved on.

In Mark's gospel we also read of Jesus' raising back to life Jairus' little daughter. She had died and Jairus was earnestly begging Jesus to restore her life. Some asked Jairus why he was bothering the Teacher since she had already died. But it was a not a bother to Jesus. Despite the mocking and doubt of onlookers, Jesus took her by the hand and said: "Little girl, I tell you to get up" (Mark 5:40). Her body immediately responded back to life. But Jesus didn't stop there. He reminded them to give her something to eat. Perhaps they



needed reminding amidst all of the excitement and amazement of what happened. Again we see Jesus giving healing and physical touch. He showed that Jairus' daughter should have food to strengthen her little body back to health.

Another gospel writer, John, relates a story of a boy who brought to Jesus five loaves of bread and two fish. This little boy had a part in the miracle of the feeding of a very large crowd. How

honoured and proud the little boy must have felt as Jesus turned his lunch into enough food for everyone (John 6:9).

Children's praises

After Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem on a donkey, Matthew recounts how children were shouting their praises of Jesus in the temple, much to the ire of the chief priests. Angrily they asked Jesus, "Do you hear what they are saying?" Jesus replied: "Indeed I do—Haven't you read in this scripture? 'You have trained children and babies to offer perfect praise'" (Matthew 21:16). Jesus appreciated them and showed how we can learn from the genuine, simple praises offered by little children.

Jesus valued the children. He had no children by birth, but loved and cared for them all. And today He still does. Today He continues to love and care for them through our hands. We can hold a child's hand and give a word of praise and encouragement. We can have compassion and pray for them, just as the desperate father of the epileptic boy prayed for mercy for his child. We can give a smile as we pass by. We can give them something to eat. We can teach them about Jesus and His great love for little children. We can give them opportunity to shout their praises to Jesus in church. Why not let them sing and make a joyful noise freely in church services? Do we notice us 'hushing' them instead? Perhaps most of all we can learn from them, too. We can learn from their genuine and simple praises. Children do not know of lengthy, articulate prayers. But they certainly know how to shout praises to Jesus. Indeed, why not let the little children come freely? Let's help them come to us, and to Jesus! □

Reprinted with permission from New Life-Asia, July-August 1999

And by the way...

THERE WAS A RATHER LARGE CROWD at the postage stamp counter. Behind the counter sat a grumpy middle-aged lady who seemed to have some difficulty coping with the crowd of people. As I stood in the queue, I was irritated. Having to stand in a long queue for postage stamps was bad enough but nothing could be worse than having to look at the grumpy lady as she seemed to dispense stamps in slow motion.

As time passed by and I came closer to buying my requirement of postal stationery, it occurred to me that maybe I was being a little judgmental. Imagine selling stamps day in and day out without a break. That could be quite taxing on anyone. Moreover, I did not hear any of the people before me acknowledge the services of this lady with even a curt “Thank you.” I decided to try something different. When I purchased my stamps I gave the lady a smile and said, “Thank you.” Her face brightened and she said, “Don’t mention it.” I am sure she did not mean it because whenever I went to buy stamps from her and thanked her, her face always lit up with a smile.

The big events and crises absorb most of our energies. We invest a lot of time and effort in meeting the big challenges of life. The small things we do each day, and others do for us are usually never given the slightest thought. Yet it is the small things and events that colour our lives and shape our attitudes towards the big events and crises in our lives. It is the small services people perform for us that lend order and stability to our lives. We only realise their worth when they are taken away from us.

I had a teacher in high school many years ago whose husband unexpectedly died of a heart attack. About a week after his death, she shared some of her insight with her classroom of students. As the late afternoon sunlight came streaming in through the classroom windows and the class was nearly over, she moved a few things aside on the edge of her

by
Joe D’Costa

desk and sat down.

With a gentle look of reflection on her face, she paused and said, “Before class is over, I would like to share with all of you a thought which is unrelated to class, but which I feel is very important. Each of us is put here on earth to learn, share, love, appreciate and give of ourselves. None of us knows when this fantastic experience will end. It can be taken away at any moment. Perhaps this is God’s way of telling us that we must make the most out of every single day.”

Her eyes beginning to water, she went on, “So I would like you all to make me a promise. From now on, on your way to school, or on your way home, find something beautiful to notice. It doesn’t have to be something you see—it

in a while I think of that teacher and remember what an impression she made on all of us, and I try to appreciate all of those things that sometimes we all overlook.

The small things in life may be waking up early in the morning and thanking God for the gift of life and another day. It may be watching the sunrise, feeling the tingling freshness in the morning air, waiting for the household to awaken to the beginning of another day. It may mean giving a hug and kiss to your wife/husband and children when they wake up. It may mean catching the usual train or bus to work, acknowledging the greetings of your fellow passengers, exchanging pleasantries with friends and colleagues and performing the small acts of kindness that fill your days. It



could be a scent—perhaps of freshly baked bread wafting out of someone’s house, or it could be the sound of the breeze slightly rustling the leaves in the trees, or the sunset. Please, look for these things, and cherish them. For, although it may sound trite to some, these things are the ‘stuff’ of life. The little things we are put here on earth to enjoy. The things and people we often take for granted. We must make it important to notice them, for at any time...it can all be taken away.”

The class was completely quiet. We all picked up our books and filed out of the room silently. That afternoon, I noticed more things on my way home from school than I had that whole year. Every once

may mean getting on with your daily routine without complaining and overcoming the boredom of routine tasks.

The Bible has some very good advice for us. It says, “let us not become weary in doing good to all people (great and small, in little ways and big ways), for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” Again, “As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people...” And again, “In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you...” The history of love is made up of the small things, small quotidian responses and the courage of many who learned the value of the small and the beautiful. □

How important is your spouse?

IT WAS VERY SUDDEN. My husband had to be taken again to the hospital due to liver complications. The final diagnosis was cirrhosis of the liver and cancer of the pancreas. He had only six months to live or even less. He died a week later.

It was a shock! I was not ready. Why did he have to die? What was I going to do? I knew nothing of what was happening around me after his death. Everything was arranged by my sisters-in-law. I was mercifully spared from the preparations needed for his burial. I hardly talked and moved. I was not aware of anything and anyone except my daughters who were beside me all the time. I saw flowers, expensive wreaths, cards, from our friends but nothing registered. People offered condolences but I do not remember who they were. I felt drained of energy without the will to do or respond to anything.

My husband was buried three days after with many of our closest friends in attendance. Back home afterwards, the realisation that I would not see him any more the following morning brought the first tears of pain to my eyes, tears of loss and extreme loneliness. Somehow, the last few days at the funeral parlor gave assurance that he would still be around. I would see him everyday. I could still talk to him although he could not answer back to me, but he was there.

Everything was bleak and meaningless afterwards. Nothing made sense to me. Why was I not prepared for this? I began blaming myself for what happened. I thought maybe I should have given more time for him. Maybe I was not a good wife. Maybe he was

not happy with me. Thoughts that bordered on helplessness, pain inside that could not be described, loneliness and longing for him.

Days and weeks of self-recrimination followed. God was my constant refuge and my children my support. Well-meaning friends and relatives kept their lines open for me.

I still miss him. There are times when I think of him and wish that he were alive, years after, to help me with some major decisions I have to make once in a while. Children are a great comfort and help but no one can replace one's mate. I wish I had him to comfort me when I need comforting, to

by
Eufrocina R.
Manlulu

smell of her husband. Nights were lonely and dinner solitary with only the television as companion. Perhaps if this temporary separation had not happened, she would not have realised how important her mate was to her.

God in His infinite wisdom created the woman as a help meet for her husband. One is incomplete without the other. Even the children need both parents to assume dual responsibilities of rearing and nurturing them. If one is missing, the children are affected perhaps more than we realise.

Being a widow or widower does not come by choice. It just happens. When I lost my husband, I lost a dear friend, a confidant, a provider, a sweetheart, an inspiration. A few years from now, I will be in the twilight of my years. I miss the company of my children often. My elder daughter lives abroad with her husband but she comes to visit me as often as she can. My younger daughter leaves early in the morning for work and arrives late in the evening. We do our best to do things together as much as we can. Both are very loving and thoughtful. They are wonderful and a real blessing from God. But nothing can replace the warmth of a husband's embrace. Nor can anything replace the feeling of security with him, knowing that growing old with one's mate is worth all the sacrifice and hardship that goes with making a marriage a success. I thank my God for giving me the faith and courage to face life without a mate. I also thank God for giving us the hope of the resurrection.

Truly, only in the gospel of Jesus Christ can we find the real comfort in our sufferings and hope in our loneliness. For those of you who still have your mates with you, may you find the motivation to love them dearly from what the apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:25 and 28 : "Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it ... Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." □



share everything with me and with my now grown up daughters. He would have been proud of them. He would have been delighted to know that my elder daughter is now happily married to a fine guy.

How much does my spouse mean to me? More than I could ever imagine. How about you? How much do you value your mate? How much are you willing to give to be with him or her?

Oftentimes we only realise the importance of a loved one when he or she is gone. A friend whose husband had to leave for a job abroad felt relieved during the first week. The second week she missed the familiar sights and

Hope or hype? Are Christians

*When the skies are bright canary
yellow
I forget ev'ry cloud I've ever seen,
So they called me a cock-eyed optimist
Immature and incurably green.*

*I have heard people rant and rave
and bellow
That we're done and we might as
well be dead,
But I'm only a cock-eyed optimist
And I can't get it into my head.*

*I hear the human race
Is fallin' on its face
And hasn't very far to go,
But ev'ry whippoorwill
Is sellin' me a bill,
And tellin' me it just ain't so.*

*I could say life is just a bowl of Jello
And appear more intelligent and
smart,
But I'm stuck like a dope
With a thing called hope,
And I can't get it out of my heart!*
—South Pacific by Rogers and
Hammerstein

Am I, like Nellie in *South Pacific*,
also just a cock-eyed optimist?
Like her, I'm stuck on hope, and I
can't get it out of my heart.

I believe that although the world
is a pretty awful place now, it is
going to get better. I believe God
is alive and interested in what
is happening to us here below,
even though sometimes it doesn't
seem like it. And I believe that
although I am getting older, I will
live for ever. I also believe that you
probably will too.

You see, there is a verse in the
Bible which, if it is true, alters
everything we know about being
alive. You'll find that verse in the
first chapter Revelation, the last
book in the Bible. It says:

"I am the Living One; I was dead,
and behold I am alive for ever and
ever! And I hold the keys of death
and Hades [the grave]."¹

I know that sounds 'religious'
and there is a temptation to
skim over it. But take a closer
look, and 'unpack' it, as they say.



by
**John
Halford**

Because, *if it is true* it really does
revolutionise our understanding
of what it means to be a human
being.

The person who wrote this
was probably John, the last
survivor of Jesus' original twelve
disciples. When he wrote it he
was a very old man, living in
exile in a Roman penal colony.
While there he was given a
remarkable vision of what the
future held for the world in
general and the followers of
Jesus in particular.

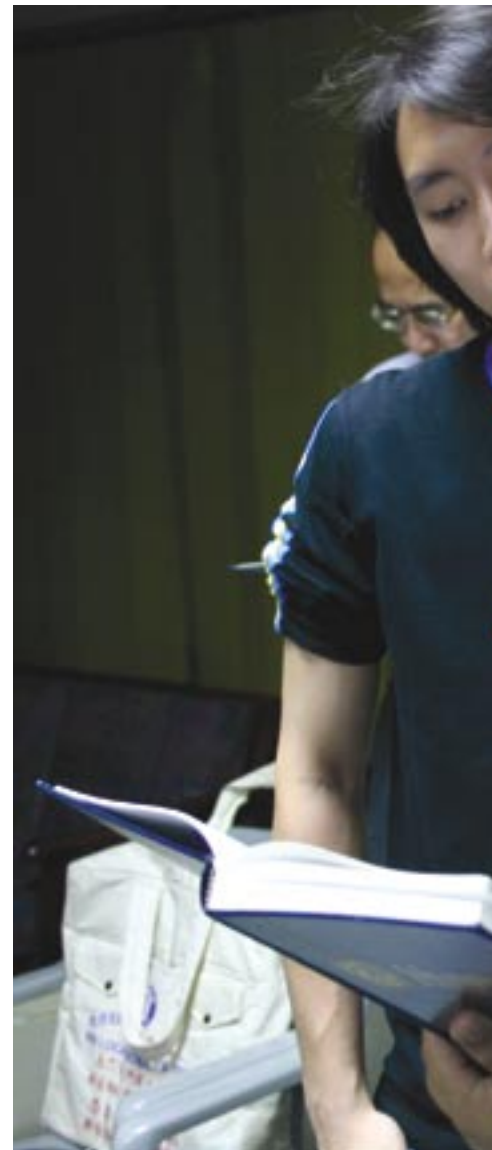
Beyond the grave

John recognised the speaker of
these words as Jesus, who had
been executed about sixty years
before. Now, *six decades later*, he
appears and claims that he is the
'living one', who 'was dead.' John
knew that. He had seen Jesus
after He was resurrected and
ascended to heaven. But then
Jesus says He will stay alive for
ever and ever. He also claims to
have a 'key' that will unlock the
way to defeat the power of the
grave, not only for Himself but
for others too.

Considering our experience
of life and death, this is a
preposterous statement. In the days
when these words were written,
an average life span was around
forty five years. Very few made
it past their three score and ten.
Today, better health and hygiene
has extended the average life for
people living in the richer parts of
the world. It isn't unusual to find
birthday cards for a one hundredth
birthday on sale at an average High
Street newsagent's. The UK already
has about 8,000 centenarians. By
2030 there may be over 30,000.

It is estimated that about half
the children born in a developed
European nation today can expect
to live past 100. Some researchers
believe it may be possible to
extend human lives to perhaps 150
or so years. But that is about it.
Inevitably even the fittest of us have
a date with the grave.

No wonder we get excited when
scientists come up with something
(like Viagra) that is able to prolong
just one aspect of our lives. But
realistically, no one should expect
to live 'for ever and ever'. But here
is Jesus claiming He has a way to
overcome the power of the grave.



If that is true, it is the most
astounding 'breakthrough' in
longevity ever announced. If it
is not true, this article is just the
ramblings of a cock-eyed optimist,
and you are wasting your time
reading it.

So am I, like Nellie, 'immature

ns just cock-eyed optimists?

and incurably green? Are you, if you believe it too?

Smoke and mirrors?

The only evidence we have for believing such an outrageous statement is that Jesus Christ was resurrected from His grave,

there's no living Christ" he wrote to the Christians in Ancient Corinth. "And face it—if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors.



and eventually ascended to heaven *where he is still*. When it comes down to it, the Christian faith stands or falls on that.

St. Paul, one of the first, and arguably the greatest evangelist, was honest enough to admit that. "If there's no resurrection,

Not only that, but we would be guilty of telling a string of barefaced lies about God, all these affidavits we passed on to you verifying that God raised up Christ—sheer fabrications, if there's no resurrection."

"If corpses can't be raised,"

continues Paul, "then Christ wasn't, because he was indeed dead. And if Christ wasn't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever. It's even worse for those who died hoping in Christ and resurrection, because they're already in their graves. If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot."²

But Paul goes on to reassure the Corinthians (and us), "But the truth is that Christ has been raised up, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries."³

But how can he be so sure? Where is the evidence that Jesus was resurrected and is alive?

Willing to adjust

We have often explained in this magazine that we cannot prove to a skeptic, beyond all shadow of doubt, that God exists, and that the Bible is true. But that does not mean that we have no evidence. Or that the evidence is so shaky that every whiff of criticism can blow it away.

The Christian message has always had its critics. Some have been valid, and have caused us to think about our understanding of the Bible. It was silly and shortsighted, for example, for mediæval theologians to insist that the sun went around the earth when the evidence clearly showed that the opposite was true.

Today the increase in knowledge in nearly every field continues to challenge traditional ideas, and some concepts we have taken for granted do need to be adjusted. But this does not mean that the core beliefs of our faith are being undermined, or that the whole idea is so flimsy that we have to go back to the drawing board every time someone brings up an awkward question.

Some people have worried, for example, about the idea behind the best selling novel 'The Da Vinci Code'. It is based around the search for evidence that Jesus was not crucified, buried and resurrected as the Gospels tell us. Rather, He

married Mary Magdalene, moved to France and had children, founding a family line that survives to this day. The church suppressed this information, and tried to destroy it. But the truth was preserved by secret societies, and the evidence of who Jesus really was is buried under the Louvre in Paris. If exposed it will bring down the whole edifice of Christian belief. And only one man and woman can unveil the truth... you know the sort of thing.

'The DaVinci Code' is a pretty good read. The author clearly says it is a work of fiction. Nevertheless it unsettles some people who worry that 'there might be something in it'. Oh how we love conspiracy theories!

The right to believe

But why do we assume that what we believe in is so vulnerable? Why not turn the argument around and ask 'how good is the evidence that Christianity is not true? Or to put it another way, how much proof do you need before you have the right to say you believe something?

Let me go (humbly and respectfully, I hope) on the offensive. You see, I don't believe that the Theory of Evolution, as it is usually explained, is good enough to be the only acceptable explanation for the origin and development of life. I believe that there are other explanations, and that to dismiss them out of hand is arrogant and unscientific.

I am not suggesting that evolution is a load of bunk. I have seen enough evidence to acknowledge that it, or something like it, might explain how life develops within a species. Charles Darwin was a careful scientist, as are many who followed in his footsteps. I have seen professional paleontologists at work, and I am impressed by the meticulous care with which they sift and evaluate their evidence—such as it is. I think they make a plausible case for what they call microevolution—that is, change and development within a species. But to extrapolate that evidence to

show that it accounts for the actual origin of those species, is, I think, stretching things.

I don't think they have proved their point beyond all shadow of doubt, and I believe other points of view deserve to be heard. One of those points of view is that there is a Creator God and the cosmos (including life) was created by Him

no serious questions about the fact of Jesus' existence. If we measure the Gospels by the same standards we evaluate other historical literature, we must conclude that they are a reliable record of what Jesus said and did. Scholars will always quibble about the details, but the questions do not threaten or undermine the



for a purpose, and that purpose includes the eternal destiny of what is now the human race.

Now, I don't expect the above paragraphs to cause dyed-in-the-wool atheists to throw in the towel and head for the nearest church. But I also do not accept that it gives them the right to ridicule me, because it is not a ridiculous thing to say.

You see, there is no conclusive evidence that there is not a Creator. No one has proved that God does not exist. There are

essential components of Christian belief, including the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Based on the standards that we believe other things, my faith in the message of the Bible should not be considered uneducated, immature, foolish or naïve. It is not therefore the ramblings of a cock-eyed optimist to believe that a man born two thousand years ago was crucified, buried, resurrected and ascended to heaven, and is still alive today.

Still much to learn

If there is one thing that the last few decades should have taught us is that no one, believer or non-believer should be calling each other foolish or naïve. It should be obvious to all that there is a tremendous amount still to learn.

What is being discovered on the frontiers of knowledge should cause everyone to be willing to re-evaluate even the most entrenched ideas. Tried and tested physical laws seem to break down at the sub-atomic level. Constants like the speed of light might not be quite so constant after all. Traditional physics is being turned on its head.

Isaac Newton proved the ancients were wrong in their explanation of reality. Then Einstein showed that Newton was wrong in some of his ideas, and once again reshaped our understanding of the universe. But now some are seriously questioning if Einstein got it right. The more we look into it, the cosmos seems to be ever more intricate, mysterious and marvellous. And let not those who believe in God be smug and say “we told you so”, because we didn’t. No one anticipated the discoveries that are revolutionising our understanding of reality.

What is interesting is how scientists, trying to find words to explain what they learn, resort to terms that sometimes seem more appropriate for theology than physics. But why not? Truth, after all is truth, and genuine discovery poses no threat to a proper understanding of our Creator.

Nothing that has been discovered has undermined the faith of this cock-eyed optimist. On the contrary, it has reinforced it. I see no reason not to be ‘stuck like a dope on a thing called hope’. In fact, in this ever shifting and rather dangerous world, it makes more and more sense.

So can we talk about hope for a while?

An anchor for the soul

“Faith, hope and charity” said St. Paul, “and the greatest of these is charity.”⁴ He did not go on to say which of the three is the least, but chances are you’d opt for hope. Unlike ‘faith’, the way we use the word ‘hope’ today carries with it an element of uncertainty.

You buy a lottery ticket hoping it is the winning number. You plan a picnic hoping it doesn’t rain. You know you can’t have absolute faith that you will win the jackpot or not get wet. You just hope you don’t. Hope is what you have when you can’t have total faith.

But that is not the way the Bible uses the idea of hope. It is much more than a sort of decaffeinated faith. The writer of the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews describes hope as an ‘anchor for the soul’⁵.

Sailors drop an anchor when they want their ship to stay in a fixed position in the ever-changing environment of the sea. An anchor stops you drifting. You know where you are.

You need some anchor points in this world, which sometimes—and never more than now—seems to be adrift. Old ideas are found to be wrong. Trusted institutions are shown to be unreliable. Traditions are abandoned. Who can you trust? On what can you rely? Where are we headed? Have we lost the plot? Is there a plot?

Into this sea of uncertainty, the Bible brings some fixed points—things you can count on no matter what else happens. It tells you that there is a God. Then it tells you that he is benevolent and loving, and wants good things for you.

That is not as obvious as it might seem. Many people believe in ‘gods’ that are anything but benevolent. Some are very nasty bits of work indeed, and it is best to keep out of their way unless you want something they control—like rain, fertility or wealth. And then you’d better approach them carefully, and make it worth their

while. Even some people who claim to believe in the God of the Bible have a level of understanding that is not much more sophisticated. This is not, however, how the God of the Bible reveals Himself.

Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham, explains it like this:

“Christian hope isn’t optimism, a vague sense that things will probably turn out all right. Christian faith is trusting—and going on trusting through thick and thin—in the God who made unbreakable promises and will certainly keep them. Christian hope is looking ahead to the time when, according to those promises, God will make the world over anew, completing the work he began in Jesus.”⁶

The resurrection of Jesus to Eternal life, and all that it implies is not just the wishful thinking of cock-eyed optimists. Nor is it just the refuge of naïve people who won’t face reality. It is an idea which has been carefully examined by educated and brilliant people, who have chosen to believe it after considering the alternatives. It can be defended and supported. There is no evidence to show that it isn’t true.

That is why I say that the scripture I quoted at the beginning transforms everything we know and believe about our existence. I don’t believe ‘the human race is falling on its face’, although I think it is time we fell to our knees. But even if we don’t there is hope for us. That hope is based on who Jesus was, and still is.

That hope cannot casually be dismissed as superstition. And when you take it seriously, and let it provide a foundation for how you live your life, the more it becomes a reliable and comforting anchor for your soul. □

¹ Revelation 1:18

² 1 Corinthians 15:15–19

³ *ibid* v. 20

⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:13

⁵ Hebrews 6:19

⁶ *Hebrews For Everyone* by Tom Wright, SPCK, 2003, p. 67

Ever thought of tr

HIGH TRADE-IN VALUE for your old car' the advertisement promised. So I went to this car dealer to trade-in my old car for a new one. I was hoping the dealer would give me a good trade-in value as my car was still in reasonably good condition. I was hoping to reduce my payment for the new car.

The dealer surveyed my vehicle and gave me the bad news that my old car was worth much less than I expected. Often a trade-in value sounds just too good to be true.

It's the same with life itself. Do you sometimes wish that you could trade in your dull life for a more exciting one? Our old lives are filled with so much we would like to be rid of—poverty, ill-health, broken relationships, worry, fear, pain, shame, addiction, oppression and misery. Is there a dealer out there who will take our 'used' life and give us a better deal? Yes—there is definitely a generous dealer who is willing to offer us high trade-in values for all our wares—values far beyond our wildest expectation. It is definitely worth while to seek out this dealer. He has a long record of giving unbeatable value. You'll find many examples of his 'special deals' in the Bible.

God is holy and righteous, but we are not. We are by nature sinful—given to pride, jealousy, lust, greed, selfishness, deceitfulness and violence. We don't naturally love God or our fellowman. We love ourselves and we love those who love us. Describing the human condition, the prophet Isaiah writes: "we have all become an unclean thing and all our righteousness are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). Similarly, the apostle Paul writes: "there is none righteousness, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). They were telling the people then and us today that there is nothing we can do to make ourselves holy and righteous. No amount of sacrifices, no amount of good works, no amount of charities and no amount of prayers can make us righteous before God. The only way we can

become righteous in God's eyes is to trade in our unrighteousness and accept His righteousness. God is very gracious. He wants us to confess our sins and accept Christ's sacrifice to cover our sins and receive His righteousness. This is how we obtain high trade-in values for our fig-leaf quality wares.

Freedom for slavery

About 3,500 years ago ancient Israel became a slave nation under the oppressive Egyptian regime ruled by Pharaoh and his taskmasters. The oppression was so great that they cried out to God for deliverance. God took pity on them and sent the prophet Moses to deliver them (Exodus 2:23–25; 14:30). He freed them from their slavery and gave them good land—a land flowing with milk and honey. They got a good bargain—freedom for slavery.

But their freedom was short-lived. They didn't obey God and they became slaves again. Instead of thanking God for the freedom, they were accusing Him and His servants for not providing them with all their cravings and desires. They complained and griped and became slaves to their own carnal nature. They also turned to other gods which could not deliver them. In due time, they became slaves to foreign powers such as Assyria and Babylon. Whenever they turned to God, He delivered them, and whenever they rebelled, He allowed them to be oppressed. This went on time and again. About 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ came to deliver them and all the world from spiritual slavery.

Psychologists today tell us that anger, malice, envy, jealousy, hatred, greed and pride are not good for our health because they trigger all kinds of bad chemical reactions in our bodies and make us miserable and unhappy. Christ offers to exchange all this for healthy and positive behaviour, such as showing kindness and patience, making peace with our



**by
Dr. P.
Sellappan**

neighbours, and esteeming others better than ourselves. God is asking us to give up our wrong ways of thinking which make us unhappy and receive His own divine nature which will make us happy and joyful.

Do you sometimes feel that life is oppressing you and that you have become a slave to all kinds of bad habits and attitudes? If so, take heart, you are not alone. We all experience this to one degree or another. God knows our human weaknesses and He is asking us to trade these in for His divine nature.

Loving heart for stone heart

Deep inside, I am sure we all want to be thought of as kind, merciful, gentle, patient, caring, serving and giving. Unfortunately some of us have become cold and hard-hearted. We have a reputation for being mean, selfish, harsh, unkind, unforgiving, uncaring and unloving. People don't like to be around us. God is inviting us to give our lives to Him so that He can transform our cold, mean and selfish hearts to kind, loving, caring, merciful and generous hearts. That's the kind of trade-in value God is offering you and me, and it is absolutely free (Hebrews 8:10).

God doesn't give you all this at once. First, He gives you a 'down payment' of His divine nature (the Holy Spirit) which empowers you to overcome (albeit gradually) and helps you become more and more like Him.

Happy relationships for failed relationships

Many of us come from dysfunctional or broken families. We may not have had good relationships with our parents, spouses, other family members or relatives. We may not even have good friends to lean on, especially in times of difficulty. Take heart, God is inviting you into a loving relationship with Him as well as with countless others who

Trading-in your life?

have also chosen to enter into a relationship with Him. You will have many brothers and sisters and friends as well as a loving and faithful partner in Jesus Christ. This relationship begins when you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour and become part of the body of Christ, which is His church. As you obey and serve God and fellow man, your relationship with Him as well as with others will grow and bear



fruit. You will experience joy that you had never experienced before. Trading your failed relationships for a happy, lasting relationship is certainly worth considering.

Laughter and joy for pain and sorrow

Are you suffering from broken relationships and unresolved guilt? If you are, you are not alone. For many, life is oppressive. They have to live a very hard and painful existence full of sorrows, unhappiness, suffering and tears. Some even commit suicide because they are afraid to face all that life challenges. The world can be a cruel and unkind place. What can you do if you are in such a situation?

While life may still be difficult, don't despair. There is hope. God is inviting you to exchange your sorrows, pains, struggles and tears for a more fulfilling and abundant

life. He promises to lighten your burden and set you free so that you can pursue those things that really matter in life (Mathew 11:28–30).

The prophet Isaiah tells us that God is waiting to give us beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness—a happy, joyful life for an unhappy, miserable life (Isaiah 61:3). He also assures us that He will soon banish all our pains, sorrows and tears and give us joy and happiness (Revelation 21:3–5).

Immortality for mortality

And finally, the best trade-in of all—immortality (eternal life) for mortality. We all fall sick from time to time. Some have to endure suffering because of cancer, AIDS/HIV or other terminal diseases, while others die instantaneously because of accident or heart attack. When sickness or tragedy strikes, our whole life changes almost instantaneously and we are forced to adjust our expectations accordingly. But the good news is: God is inviting us to surrender our temporary, physical life for permanent, eternal life—a tremendous bargain! Check out these promises in the Bible for yourself (1 Corinthians 15:50–57, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, Revelation 20:6).

I could go on with many other trade-in offers. For example, God promises to make good all your lost or fouled-up opportunities by giving you the desires of your heart. He will give you abilities, talents and opportunities so you will always have exciting things to do and never get bored. He also promises a literal paradise where you will lack nothing (Psalms 16:11, Isaiah 55:1–2, Revelation 21, John 6:27, 35).

What's the catch?

Why is God so generous? The answer is there's really no catch because God doesn't behave like we human beings. We plot, scheme

and put things in fine print in order to deceive people and realise our own selfish objectives. God doesn't do that because he is God and He is always good, kind and generous. As a loving Father, he simply wants to give good things to us—His children.

Although God will make good all His promises in due time, there are a number of things He now allows. For example, He doesn't promise Christians a pain- or trouble-free life; He doesn't promise all Christians physical riches, and He doesn't prevent all temptations and persecutions. God allows these things so that we might put our trust in Him, not in ourselves. He promises to deliver us from all sufferings in due time—some now, some later, and all in the resurrection.

You might say: "All this is illusion. There is no such dealer with so much power to deliver all these utopian promises". You would be absolutely right—if there were no God. But the good news is there is a God who is not only all-powerful, all-wise, all-knowing, but who is also kind, merciful, loving, gracious and generous. For God, fulfilling these promises is trivial because He is infinitely greater than our minds can grasp or imagine. There is absolutely nothing that He cannot do (Jeremiah 32:27, Matthew 19:26). So we don't have to worry about Him not being able to deliver His promises.

Then you might ask: "If all this is true, when will it take place?" The answer is: according to God's timing (1 John 3:2, Romans 8:18–19). God's work with human beings always starts very small like a mustard seed and grows gradually (Mathew 13:31–32). There is no presto change. This is because God is developing character in us and this process takes time.

The transformation process starts the moment we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour and commit our lives to Him. You can trust Him to make good all His promises. Many have. So why not trade in your dull, mediocre life for an exciting new life in Christ Jesus today? It will be your best trade-in deal ever. □

Mirror, mirror on the wall...

AFTER COMPLETING secondary education, my school-mate Marie and I decided to head to the city to pursue a secretarial course. Among the few possessions which we took along were two small mirrors. One was just plain and ordinary, the other a beautiful antique.

The plain mirror provided a true and clear reflection of our faces, blemishes and all. The antique mirror gave a hazy indistinct image, playing down our imperfections. We looked good in that antique mirror and it bolstered our confidence whenever we used it. Naturally it became our favourite mirror.

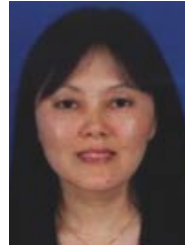
Marie and I often laughed about this deception of 'looking good'. But we continued using the antique mirror because it helped shore up whatever little confidence we had about our appearances. We chose to believe a lie about ourselves.

In a similar way to our little deception of ourselves, it is reassuring to learn, as we grow older, that God is more interested with how our heart looks than how we look in the mirror: "The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart"¹. A Christian friend of mine was zealously memorising some scriptures when she noticed her husband, whose eye-sight is failing, spill some coffee on to the floor. Right away she stopped memorising and shouted 'bodoh' at her husband followed by a torrent of unintelligent words. Then she coolly went back to memorising the scriptures.

Another time I found her singing praises to God when again she abruptly stopped with shouts of 'bodoh, stupid and idiot'. This time her husband had dropped some rice on to the floor and then stepped on

it. After some more similar tongue lashing at her husband, she again coolly went back to singing praises to God.

This situation has become almost a normal daily occurrence in their household. She tries to kid herself that by nagging and much scolding with stinging and wounding words at her husband, the situation will improve. It hasn't, of course. Instead it has turned her into an angry, quick-tempered



by
**Stefanie
Tai**

the situation will improve. But it hasn't, of course, and it won't. Instead she has become an angry, quick-tempered, difficult person to everyone she meets. But she still thinks she is the model Christian, listening to God and heeding the words she reads in the Bible.

But the Epistle of James warns us to "not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it

says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does."²

Let's not fool or kid ourselves—just simply hearing, reading, looking, or even memorising God's word, isn't enough. If we genuinely want to become more Christ-like in all areas of our lives, in our attitudes, actions and reactions, to conform ourselves more and more to God's ways, we must humbly look into God's clear mirror, the Bible, to reveal our blemishes, faults and weaknesses. Once uncovered, we must obey and act upon God's Word, allowing the scriptures to guide, change or transform us into the pure image of Christ. And we will be blessed for becoming doers of God's Word.

As we practise being doers of the Word, the Holy Spirit will grant us inner peace and calm that reflects Christ's true beauty through us. We will then look good before God. This is the mirror we need to carry with us wherever we go, and to become our lifelong companion. □



and difficult person to be around. This situation has become the norm in her household. Like Marie and me, she has deluded herself into thinking that by nagging and much scolding, using stinging, wounding words at her husband,

¹ 1 Samuel 16:7

² James 1:22–25

Thought for the week:
Make your life a mission, not an intermission.
Arnold H. Glasgow

The unexamined life is not worth living.
Socrates

Be humble or you'll stumble.
Dwight Moody

Experience is one thing you can't get for nothing.
Oscar Wilde

We are continuously faced by great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems.
Lee Iacocca

The only real mistake is the one from which we learn nothing.
John Powell

Only the heart knows how to find what is precious.
Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape.
Unknown

There was a definite process by which one made people into friends, and it involved talking to them and listening to them for hours at a time.
Rebecca West

The secret of getting ahead is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex overwhelming tasks into small manageable tasks, and then starting on the first one.
Mark Twain

Give me the luxuries of life and I will willingly do without the necessities.
Frank Lloyd Wright

Indolence is a delightful but distressing state; we must be doing something to be happy.
Mahatma Gandhi

Be faithful to that which exists nowhere but in yourself—and thus make yourself indispensable.
Andre Gide

The probability that we may fail in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just.
Abraham Lincoln

If the point is sharp, and the arrow is swift, it can pierce through the dust no matter how thick.
Bob Dylan

Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness.
Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present, 1843

There is no revenge so complete as forgiveness.
Josh Billings

My father used to say, 'Let them see you and not the suit. That should be secondary.'
Cary Grant

Fish and visitors smell in three days.
Benjamin Franklin, Poor Richard's Almanack, 1736

Imagination is more important than knowledge...
Albert Einstein



ON THE LIGHTER SIDE

The schoolteacher was taking her first golfing lesson. "Is the word spelled p-u-t or p-u-t t?" she asked the instructor. "P-u-t-t is correct," he replied. "Put means to place a thing where you want it. Putt means merely an unsuccessful attempt to do the same thing."

We don't know who we are until we see what we can do.
Martha Grimes

If you would be a real seeker after truth, it is necessary that at least once in your life you doubt, as far as possible, all things.
Rene Descartes

We don't receive wisdom; we must discover it for ourselves after a journey that no one can take us or spare us.
Marcel Proust

We don't get offered crises, they arrive.
Elizabeth Janeway

Convinced myself, I seek not to convince.
Edgar Allan Poe, Berenice

We need men who can dream of things that never were.
John F. Kennedy

I do not confer praise or blame: I accept. I am the measure of all things. I am the centre of the world.
W. Somerset Maugham, 'Of Human Bondage', 1915

The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of.
Blaise Pascal

Health is not valued till sickness comes.
Dr. Thomas Fuller, Gnomologia, 1732

Love is not enough. It must be the foundation, the cornerstone—but not the complete structure. It is much too pliable, too yielding.
Bette Davis

Take calculated risks. That is quite different from being rash.
George S. Patton

A discovery is said to be an accident meeting a prepared mind.
Albert von Szent-Gyorgyi

While one person hesitates because he feels inferior, the other is busy making mistakes and becoming superior.
Henry C. Link

When we are reading, we often find something that attracts our interest. It's not earth-shattering, or life-changing. But it's worth cutting out and keeping, or sticking on the refrigerator door, or maybe sending to us for this page!

We invite all our readers to contribute news items, quotes, or poems, that make you say 'Hmm'. It could be in today's paper, or in a book hundreds of years old. Try to send the original clipping, or a copy of the page to:

Hmm... The Plain Truth, Locked Bag 2002, 41990 Klang, Selangor, Malaysia.

Seven keys to a

WHY DOES ANYONE MARRY? The answer is: for happiness! Yet the sad fact is, many marriages are unhappy even if they don't end up in a divorce.

Are happy marriages a matter of chance? Does it depend on matching horoscopes? (You can get those for a fee!) No. It depends on how both parties work for the success of the project. Yes, marriages can be compared with a business project, a partnership concern. It depends on how the husband and wife behave towards each other and work together as a team. It depends on the observance of certain basic principles:

1. Communicate.

This is the most important factor. You must communicate freely. If anything is bothering you, get it off your chest. Be polite and courteous. Always be truthful—a lie destroys the trust, which is one of the foundations of marriage. Speak frequently, regularly and lovingly to each other. Apart from words, communication also involves tone of the voice, facial expression and body language. Besides talking, it also includes little notes, letters, phone calls and so on. The most important part of conversation is listening! Listen with interest, empathy and without

interruptions. Share the day's happenings at work, home and in between.

**by
Dr. Sudhir
Singh**

2. Give time for family.

Most men (and now women too) don't give enough time for the family. They are super-busy with their work. If they have any free time at all, it is used for individual pursuits. Their main aim in life is to accumulate money, property and 'contacts'. You need to keep apart sufficient time to talk, play and nurture your families. Many retired executives have said that their greatest regret was that they didn't give sufficient time to their families



happy marriage



in the prime of their life. By the time you retire, it is too late!

3. Share housework.

The old days of strict separation of outside work and house work are over. Nowadays both partners often have to work. It is simply too much for a wife to handle both a job and house work. Even if she is a full-time housewife, there are myriad things to do at home. Often this work is more than the work in an outside job! So husbands must help on a daily basis. Maybe you can wash the dishes and iron the clothes. Offer your help even without being asked. You will be surprised at the wonders it does to your marriage!

4. Manage money carefully.

Though accumulating more and more wealth doesn't produce happiness, proper money management is essential for a happy marriage. Many marriages

flounder on the rocks of financial irresponsibility. Work diligently at your job and always keep your expenses in check. Never buy for the sake of vanity or keeping up with the Joneses. Always buy what you really need and can easily afford. Remember the saying: "income Rs.5000, expenses Rs.4999, result: Happiness. Income Rs.5000, expenses Rs.5001, result: Misery!" Budget your money carefully. Regular savings should be an essential item on your budget. Drop by drop really does make an ocean. Never say you can't afford to save. The truth is: You can't afford not to save!

5. Don't try to change your mate.

This is a common reason for unhappiness, discord and even divorce. Never try to change your mate to your image of the 'ideal'. The only person you can ever change is yourself. You can

never change another—even your mate. It is for that person to change himself or herself. Of course, you can bully a person into a reluctant 'change', but it is not real and it kills love. You will end up with an empty, loveless, miserable marriage. Remember, marriage is all about love. Every person is a distinct, unique individual and a free moral agent. So learn to tolerate and even enjoy the differences! Never give unasked for advice. Remember how resentful you feel when someone does that to you?! So change yourself into a better husband or wife (it is a lifelong process) and never try to change your mate. Marriage is all about love—not changing the mate!

6. Avoid physical and substance abuse.

Wife beating is common across all social levels, from the slum to the millionaire's mansion. And it is terribly wrong. There is no place for violence in marriage. Beware of all addictions. They damage the body and mind. Be especially alert about alcoholism. It slowly creeps upon you until you are in its vice-like grip and there is no escape. Alcoholism is a common destroyer of marriages in Asia. It's almost always the husband who becomes an alcoholic and starts beating his wife. So if you have a problem with alcohol, get help—for your sake and for the sake of your family.

7. Keep a sense of humour.

Life is not worth living without humour. Earnestly try to develop your sense of humour. It produces personal happiness and strengthens marriages. It improves your physical and mental health too. Learn to see the funny side of things. Laugh often and be merry. Have fun. Humour also provides a strong defence against trials and adversity. Gandhiji said: "If I didn't have a sense of humour, I would have committed suicide long ago!"

Try these seven keys and see what happens to your marriage. □

A lesson about fishing

AS JESUS WALKED beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, because they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed Him. When He had gone a little farther, He saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed Him.

When I was a small boy growing up in northern Louisiana, I went fishing every chance I got. By age six, though, we had moved to Southern California, and between the rigors of big city life and my family not having much money, chances for fishing were dramatically fewer. Still, there were the occasional trips to the Malibu pier with a friend, and a couple of times a year my uncle took me out on one of the off-shore barges that local fishing enthusiasts flocked to. Between sessions of untangling lines with the elbow-to-elbow crowd on board, we usually managed to hook a couple of bonita, several mackerel and, if we were really lucky, a small halibut.

We fished the Kern River a couple of times, as well as Lake Isabella and Lake Piru. As a boy, I had a clear definition of the difference between freshwater and saltwater fishing: Freshwater fishing is usually more relaxing, but the fish are smaller and you’re less likely to catch one.

The kind of fishing the Zebedee boys were doing in Jesus’ day was nothing like the hook, line and sinker kind I enjoy. What they did was work, hard work. They would have thought I was crazy if I had suggested: “Hey guys, let’s take a break and go fishing. We all need some rest.”

They had huge, heavy nets to cast out, draw in, unload, clean, dry and mend. They had hundreds of fish to process and sell. They had the boat to clean and repair. Fishing was not a sport or a break. It was their livelihood, and in many ways it was

their life.

We are not told whether James and John liked their part in their dad’s fishing business. All we know is that when Jesus called them, they left it and followed Him. Presumably, Jesus said the same thing to them that He said to Simon and Andrew, “Come after me and I will make you fishers of men.”

What did Jesus have in mind when He said, “Fishers of men”?

Most of us Bible types are quick to run analogies into the ground. Jesus, being a good bit smarter than we are and knowing a little something about analogies,

by
**Michael J.
Fezell**

casting the gospel to draw in people for the kingdom of God.

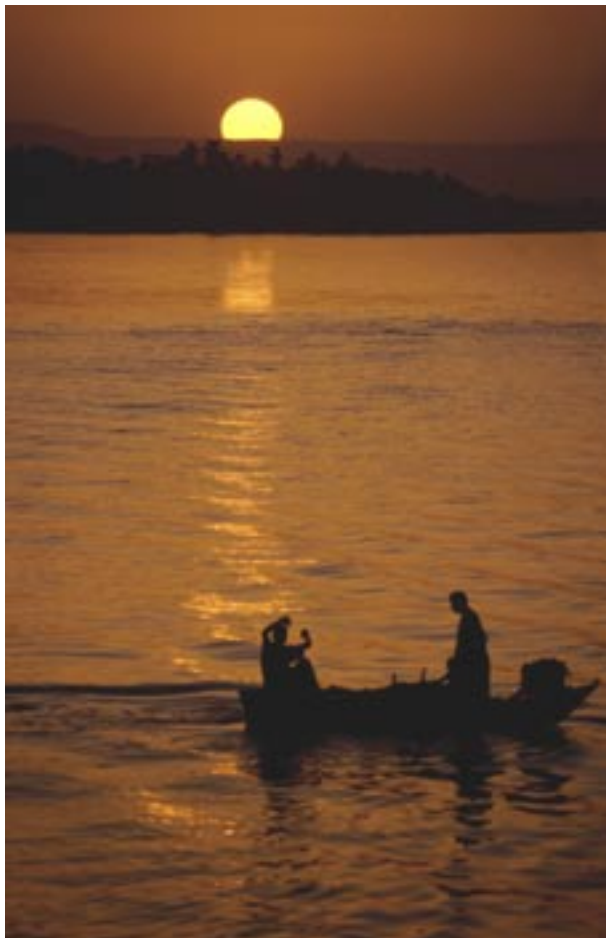
In Mark’s previous paragraph, he described Jesus as preaching, “Repent and believe the gospel” (v. 15). It’s a rather indiscriminate message. Like a net, it falls wherever it falls and, like fish, some people get caught in it while others swim obliviously by.

We count the fish who, by time and chance, escape the net, as lucky fellows who will grow a little bigger for the next time the net comes their way. We count the people who run from or dismiss the gospel as missing out on the best thing that could ever happen to them, and we pray that they might get caught next time the gospel splashes down around them.

As Jesus mentioned once, however, in a parable, the fishing net gathers up a whole lot of stuff besides good-eating fish (Matthew 13:47–48). The net does not discriminate; it picks up every kind of fish out there, good and bad alike. At the end of the day the worthless ones have to be separated out and discarded.

Likewise, the gospel does not discriminate; it applies to the whole world (John 3:16; 1 John 2:1–2). But the only ones who can join the great celebration of the kingdom of God are the ones who believe that they really are in God’s gracious net. If they won’t trust God’s word of love and grace for them, then the gospel of their salvation is meaningless to them, and they cannot even understand the kingdom of God, much less desire to be part of it. They prefer their own kingdom, the shriveled, selfish one they think is so grand. So they have to be tossed out of God’s banquet room, where He had places set for everybody.

The kingdom of God is not a matter of choice; it’s a matter of trust. Peter, Andrew, James and John trusted Jesus, which is why they followed Him. It wasn’t that they sized things up and chose, like choosing ice cream over spoiled



probably was thinking more about the obvious parallels than the picky details that sometimes fill sermon time and Bible study sessions. Instead of casting nets to draw in fish for breakfast tables, these disciples would now be

milk. It was that they trusted this person who called them. He wasn't calling them to a finer and grander life; He was calling them to persecution and deprivation—and eventually to getting murdered.

If it was a choice issue, then only a foolish son would run off after an itinerant preacher instead of maintaining the family business and ensuring the care and security of his parents and siblings. But it was a trust issue—they trusted Jesus. Only in the light of trust can we see clearly that there really is no choice at all but to follow Him.

Doubt

But let's face it, sometimes we doubt. We sin, and we doubt our standing with God. Our plans and hopes are frustrated, and we might doubt whether God cares. Bad things happen to us, and we might even doubt if there is a God. Doubt is always just a downturn away, ready to move in on our often fragile faith.

But those ups and downs in the strength of our faith are all part of learning to trust Jesus Christ. God accepted His faith in our place and on our behalf, so it isn't a matter of how strong or weak our faith is—Jesus' faith before God on our behalf is what matters. Again, we rely on Him, not on our faith.

Likewise, our success in overcoming is not what we should use as a measure of our standing with God. God accepted Jesus' righteousness in our place and on our behalf, so it isn't a matter of how much progress we make in overcoming—Jesus' righteousness on our behalf is what matters. That's why we rely on Him, not on the level or steadiness of our success in overcoming. Indeed, the Spirit leads us into right behaviour, but right behaviour is no measure of our standing with God. We stand right with God for one reason only—God loved us so much that His Son took humanity into Himself and through His life, death and resurrection made humanity righteous in His righteousness. That is the substance, the reality, of our righteous standing before God.

In spite of our sins

A friend who grew up as a foster child who was shuffled from home to home expressed how he had trouble trusting new foster parents. In the back of his mind, he believed that once the new parents discovered the extent of his faults and problems, they would reject him and send him on. He would try very hard to please the new family, desperately trying to measure up, but eventually he would have to pack up and move again.

Sometimes, we can feel a bit like that in our relationship with God. We want to believe His good word for us, but in the back of our mind, there is the nagging doubt that God won't really accept us because of our sins. So we make up all kinds of ways to keep ourselves on the straight and narrow, desperately trying to measure up to some semblance of a person decent enough for God to accept. And all the while, deep inside, we believe we are sunk, because in our most honest moments we know our sins are dark and many.

If we could only believe the gospel, we would believe that Christ died for us because we are sinners, and that in spite of our sins, He has determined not to be without us. He wants us to trust Him to love us in spite of all we are, all the mess we've made of life, all the problems we've caused, people we've hurt, things we've said and places we've been. He wants us to trust Him to be our righteousness, trust Him to clean up our lives, and above all, to trust Him to love us unconditionally and to never leave us nor forsake us.

The gospel is good news for bad people, and unlike fishing nets, it doesn't need washing and mending. It's perfect just the way it is. □

What our readers say:

Thank you for sending me THE PLAIN TRUTH magazine. It was a pleasant surprise after a lapse of some years. Keep up the noble work. May God bless you all
Lena Cheah
Penang

I was a regular and keen reader of your magazine but my subscription ceased in 1970. So I am extremely excited to hear from THE PLAIN TRUTH again.
Dr. Edward M Tionsu
Kota Kinabalu

Thank you for the Dec-Jan issue of THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA. Congratulations! You have again done a fantastic job. All the articles are well written and are



very positive and encouraging. The articles help us to appreciate God's goodness and his wonderful plan for mankind—that we can become children of God and live with him forevermore free from all the pain and sufferings of this life. I especially liked the article "That man may live for ever more" by Michael Morrison. It's a brilliant article helping us focus on the real purpose of our existence here on earth and asks us carefully to consider God's gracious invitation to an eternally happy and fulfilling life with him. Thank you again for sharing this wonderful message of hope through the pages of the PTA. May God continue to bless your work richly.

Reader
Petaling Jaya

I just finished reading your magazine Oct-Nov 03 issue, given to me by a friend. Congratulations on the lovely articles which teach the word of God especially to non-Christians. I would like to receive the magazine on a regular basis, as I am an ardent reader of all spiritual (Christian) magazines and books especially now that I am retired.

Dr(Mrs) Saminathan
Ipoh

Although THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA 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.

