

# THE **Plain Truth** ASIA

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p.6

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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# Wise Up!...

**W**OW! THAT WAS A BIG FISH that just jumped over there. I'd better cast quickly or he'll get away. In my hurry I forgot the way my dad had taught me to cast my fishing line from the side, and I also forgot that he was sitting right behind me in the boat. But he didn't let me forget for long. "Wise up, son. The fish are in the lake and I'm not interested in your bait. Try casting from the side like I told you." Luckily, the hook just got caught in his coat. It could have been much worse. Have you ever done something really stupid, then almost as soon as you did it, wondered how you could have acted so foolishly? Have you ever had a disagreement with someone, then developed into a full-blown argument because you lost control of your temper and said things that you didn't really mean and wished later you hadn't said? Or have you made problems worse between yourself and your friends or parents by goading or nagging them and making snide remarks? Maybe you've told a lie to get out of trouble, but then you found that it only got you in deeper trouble. I'm afraid all of us, no matter what our age, create difficulties for ourselves because we act emotionally, or without thinking. We do not behave wisely. We act on impulse rather than sensibly. If we want things to go more smoothly in our lives we need to "wise up". Contrary to popular belief, wisdom is not some special quality you get when you are old and gray. According to the dictionary, wisdom is the power of judging rightly; following the soundest course of action, based on our experience, knowledge and understanding. It is also using common sense. How would you like to have access to a small book that can give you the secrets of wisdom? Read on!

## Book of Wisdom

The book of Proverbs in your Bible rightfully has been called, "The Book of Wisdom". Proverbs is crammed with witty, humorous, profound truths that can help us develop

that precious commodity we all need to live less stressful, more satisfying lives. For example, Proverbs observes that you will avoid unnecessary quarrels and friction if you stay calm and collected without raising your voice or doing verbal battle since "a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1, Revised Standard Version throughout). Try it! Put it to the test next time you are faced with someone who is angry with you. Say to that person, "I'm sorry, please forgive me." I think you will be happily surprised how that person's attitude or wrath will change. The word soft here is not



to be equated with weakness or effeminacy, but rather with speech that is marked by modesty and politeness. The person whose words are charged with hate or anger may well be overcome by the unexpectedness of a gracious and modest reply. He or she does not anticipate that his or her cutting remarks could be answered in such a soothing, healing manner. Tempers will cool and you will be able to discuss the problem without emotion and frustrations. It works. Proverbs emphasises the danger of lying, warning that "a false witness will not go unpunished, and he who utters lies will perish" (Proverbs 19:9). The truth of the matter is that God hates a lying tongue (Proverbs 6:

16-17). Because of its common sense approach to everyday situations, Proverbs is probably the most practical book in the Bible. It speaks to all the contemporary issues facing us today: religion, sex, drugs, money, the work ethic, hatred, fear and anger. It mirrors our shortcomings to us and instructs us, in detail, how to live wisely. If we are going to acquire wisdom, which is the foundation for easier and better living, we need to incorporate into our daily lives the godly behaviour patterns presented in Proverbs. At first they may seem odd, old-fashioned and somewhat restrictive. But they really work! There are 31 chapters

in the book of Proverbs. A chapter for each day of the month! I believe that the wisdom of the book is such that it can equip a teenager to meet any problem that could possibly come his or her way. The meaning of the Hebrew word which is translated as wisdom is 'strong' or 'firm'. To make wise is to make strong and sound in character, and this is the purpose of the book of Proverbs.

## Dynamite for living

The Proverbs are God's dynamite for living—they pack a lot of punch into a small parcel. I find each proverb condenses the meaning and power of a thousand words into one short and simple sentence. Start by reading a chapter a day, thinking about what you read and applying the principles you learn. If there is something you don't understand, ask your parents for help or have a family discussion. Talk about these principles with your friends. Remember, iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17). The beginning of wisdom is to make the effort to acquire wisdom (Proverbs 4:7). So start now to "wise up"! □

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# In marriage

**W**HEN IT COMES TO MARRIAGE, the Bible's first book says 1 + 1 should equal 1. It tells us two "I's" must become one "we" if a marriage is to thrive. Marriage counsellors and psychologists who study healthy marriages agree.

## Experts find "we-ness"

In one classic analysis, social historian Jeanette Lauer and her husband, Robert, a specialist in human behaviour, studied couples with enduring marriages. Among the couples the Lauers studied were 300 who had been happily married for 15 years or longer.

The Lauers described in an article in *Psychology Today* how the couples reflected a we-ness approach to their marriages. The couples made many "we" statements when describing their married life.

"We agree on aims and goals." "We laugh together." "We agree on a philosophy of life."

"We share outside hobbies and interests." "We agree about our sex life."

"We have a stimulating exchange of ideas." "We agree on how and how often to show affection."

"My spouse is my best friend." "I like my spouse as a person." "I confide in my spouse."

The happily married couples studied by the Lauers tried to do as many things together as possible. One husband said of his wife: "I would rather spend time with her, talk to her, be with her than with anyone else." Another said: "We try to share everything."

For these couples, said the Lauers: "'Till death do us part' is not a binding clause but a gratifying reality."

U.S. psychologist Nick Stinnett and John DeFrain, his colleague, have conducted studies of what they call "strong families." More than 3,000 families from all around the world contributed to the research and conclusions these authors described

in the book *Secrets of Strong Families*.

They found that these families had several characteristics in common. This in spite of the fact that they lived in such far-flung corners of the earth as the United States, Central and South America, South Africa or Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

The we-ness factor loomed large as binding glue in their marriages. "Members of strong families feel good about themselves as a family unit or team," wrote authors Stinnett and DeFrain. "They have a sense of belonging with each other—a sense of 'we'."

One husband said: "It came to me that the joy of life comes from

are mates, lovers, companions, partners, and best friends."

## Biblical oneness

The biblical perspective—what God says about the relationship He created—also tells us that we-ness is central to marriage. The tie which binds is described in Genesis 2:24: "A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."

The modern English paraphrased Living Bible says that a husband and wife are joined together in such a way that the two become one person. A husband and wife are not merely two separate selves who happened to sign a marriage document. They made up a new oneness—a "couple".

That oneness is not just a nice thought, it is real. Many of us have had the sad experience of seeing longtime friends who have divorced. Something about each of the former spouses seems missing.

Professor Robert C. Roberts of Wheaton College and his wife, Elizabeth, had this same reaction, one they described so eloquently in *Christian Today* magazine.

They wrote; "We say, 'Hi Joan. How's...?' We catch ourselves, and we have an

impression that the divorce means not just that Harry is no longer a 'part' of Joan's life, but that this is not quite the old Joan either. A dimension of her had been amputated."

This is what Genesis 2:24 is telling us. A real bond exists between a truly happily married couple. In fact, this God-created relationship must be present and growing if the marriage is real, and if it is to work.

## Leave, cleave, weave

It's been observed by Christian leaders, including Luis Palau, that failed marriages do not follow the formula given in Genesis.

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the two of us together rather than outside things like career, hobbies, or leisure activities."

Strong families do not let careers slash into marriage bonds. Said one wife: "My husband and I decided that family is very important to us. Our relationship and our relationship with our children will outlast jobs and cars and houses."

These families and wives are first and foremost "we-always" couples. They are, we might say, wired together. "They share all (or nearly all) aspects of their lives with interest and joy," wrote authors Stinnett and DeFrain. "They

... 1 + 1 = 1

First, the partners do not leave their parents in a broad sense. They are still holding on to past unhealthy attitudes, beliefs, desires and needs.

Neither are they cleaving to their partner, in all that this represents. They still think of themselves as “I” first. As a result, these couples do not develop a unity in their

marriage bond. He says in a *Preaching Magazine* sermon that they must: leave, cleave *and* weave.

“God’s plan and purpose for marriage is that husbands and wives *leave* their parents in order to *cleave* to one another,” says Mr. Bruland. Once this is done, the couple must work on their relationship and weave their lives

That is a powerful example of the we-ness factor at work in a couple’s life.

In another epistle, Paul described the marriage bond as a metaphor for Christ’s love for his Church.<sup>2</sup> Of this union, Paul said, “This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.”<sup>3</sup>

**Jesus and the married couple**

Ephesians 5 tells us that a bonded marriage stands as a symbol for the intertwining relationship between Christ and the Church.

In this context, Dr. Palau observes: “Christian marriages is really a triangle: a man, a woman, and Christ.” The Christian marriage then, ought to be a uniquely “we” sort of relationship.

Every truly bonded marriage is a relationship by definition. A licence, a ceremony, an exchange of vows, a blessing, even living together does not create a marriage. A marriage is a cleaving and weaving relationship. It is a God-created we-ness between two people who experience themselves as one, and act accordingly.

James Olthuis of the Institute of Christian Studies in Toronto summarised it as well as anyone: “Marriage is the ultimate human connection in which two people commit themselves to each other in a lifelong communion of sharing and caring.”

The first connection is made when two strangers of the opposite sex meet. Additional cords are strung as the couple spend time with each other and interact.

A strong bond begins to take shape and the couple marry. Throughout life, the bond grows and grows into a massive cable of ever-increasing strength.

The weaving, however, is never complete. In the words of the Roberts: “Becoming one flesh does not happen on the wedding day (or night), nor is the process very likely ever to be complete. It is a *calling* of Christian couples, a destination toward which they ever travel.” □



relationship. Dr. Palau’s advice to such people in the book *Husbands and Wives* is: “Leave. Cleave. Unify”.

Gary Bruland says the same thing. Based on Genesis 2:24, he describes in slightly different terms the same three-step process couples go through in order to create a spiritually healthy

relationship together into one “we”.

Paul defined this interweaving oneness in his letters. He spoke of it in the context of the sexual union between husbands and wives.

Paul wrote: “The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I Corinthians 7:4

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 5: 22–23

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 5:32

# It's no

**J**ESUS DIDN'T CARRY ANY SWORDS OR spears. He didn't have an army behind Him. His only weapon was His mouth, and it was His message that got Him into trouble. He made people so angry that they wanted to kill Him.

## **A dangerous message**

His message was seen not merely as wrong—it was dangerous. It was subversive. It threatened to upset the social world of Judaism. But what kind of message could make the religious leaders so angry that they would kill the messenger?

One idea that could anger the religious leaders is found in Matthew 9:13: I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners. Jesus had a message of good news for sinners, but people who considered themselves good often thought that Jesus preached bad news.

Jesus invited prostitutes and tax collectors into the kingdom of God, and the good people didn't like that. "That's not fair," they may have said. "We have been working hard to be good, and why can they get into the kingdom without working hard? If you don't keep sinners out, it isn't fair!"

Jesus was preaching that God is not fair. Even today, people don't like to hear that idea. Good Christian people want God to be fair—but He isn't.

Most people think that fairness requires equal treatment for everyone, but when it comes to salvation, God simply isn't fair.

## **More than fair**

God, however, is more than fair. His grace is far beyond anything we could deserve. God is generous, full of grace, full of mercy, loving us even though we don't deserve it.

That kind of message bothers religious leaders and all who say that the harder you work, the more you will get; if you behave better, you will get a better reward. Religious leaders like to have that kind of message, because it makes it easy to motivate people to work hard, to do right, to

live right.

## **But Jesus says, it isn't so**

If you have dug a really deep pit for yourself, if you have messed up time and time again, if you have been the worst sort of sinner, you don't have to work your way out of the pit to be given salvation. God simply forgives you for the sake of

to tell me that 'those' people are pulled out of the pit instantly, without having to do any work at all? That's not fair!"

No, grace is not "fair"—it is grace. It is a gift we did not deserve. God can be generous to whomever He wants to be generous, and the good news is that He offers His generosity to everyone. It is

**by  
Joseph  
Tkach**



Jesus. You don't have to deserve it—God simply does it. You just need to believe it. You just need to trust God, to take Him at His word: Your million-dollar debt is removed from the record.

## **Good news for ordinary people**

But it seems that some people are distressed at this kind of news. "Look, I've been working hard to get out of the pit," they might say, "and I am almost out. You mean

fair in the sense that it extends to everyone, even though this means that He forgives some people a big debt, and some people a smaller debt—the same arrangement for all even though there are different circumstances.

## **A parable of unfairness**

Matthew 20 is the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Some men worked all day long in the heat of the day. Some worked only

# t fair

half a day, and some worked only one hour, but they all got paid the same amount, a day's wage. Some got exactly what they agreed to, but others got more. The men, however, who worked all day long said, "That's not fair. We worked all day long, and it's not fair to pay us the same as those who worked less" (see verse 12).

But the men who worked all day got exactly what they had agreed to before they began work (verse 4). The only reason they got upset was because other people got more than they deserved.

What did the paymaster say? He said: "Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" (verse 15).

The boss said he would give them a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, and that's what he did—and yet the workers complained. Why? Because they compared themselves with others and they got the shorter end of the stick. They got their hopes up, and then they were disappointed.

But the landowner said: "I am doing you no wrong. If you think it's not fair, the problem is in what you expected, not in what you actually got. If it hadn't been for the amount I paid the newcomers, you would be quite happy with what I gave you. The problem is in your expectations, not in what I did. You accuse me of being bad, simply because I was good to someone else" (see verse 15).

How would you react to this? What would you think if your boss gave a bonus to the newest employees, but not to the old faithful workers? It would not be very good for morale, would it?

But Jesus was not giving us payroll advice here—He was telling a parable about the kingdom of God (verse 1).

The parable reflected something



that was happening in Jesus' ministry. God was giving salvation to people who hadn't worked very hard, and the religious leaders said: "That's not fair. You can't be generous to them. We've been working hard, and they have hardly been working." And Jesus replied, "I am bringing good news

to sinners, not to the righteous." His teaching threatened to undermine the normal motive for doing good.

## Where do we fit in?

We might like to think that we have worked all day long, bearing the burdens and the heat of the day, deserving a good reward. But we have not.

It doesn't matter how long you've been in the church or how many sacrifices you have made; those are nothing in comparison with what God is giving us. Paul worked harder than any of us; he made more sacrifices for the gospel than we realise, but he counted it all as a loss for Christ. It was nothing.

The time we've spent in the church is nothing to God. The work we've done is nothing compared with what He can do. Even at our best, as another parable says, we are unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10). Jesus has bought our entire lives; He has fair claim on every thought and every action. We cannot possibly give Him anything on top of that—even if we do everything He commands.

We are really like the workers who worked only one hour and got a whole day's wage. We just barely got started, and we were paid as if we actually did something useful.

Is that fair? Maybe we shouldn't even ask the question. If the judgment is in our favour, we shouldn't ask for another opinion!

Do we think of ourselves as people who have worked long and hard? Do we think we deserve more than we are getting? Or do we see ourselves as people who are getting an undeserved gift, regardless of how long we've worked? That is something worth thinking about. □

# The power o

**A** FEW YEARS AGO I was involved in a road accident. It was my fault, and I admitted it to the lady driver of the other car. We swapped relevant information and left the scene.

That evening I had a visit from the lady's husband who threatened and intimidated me on my own doorstep. He was obviously unwilling to forgive me, and needed to express his anger in the verbal outrage. Obviously my

by  
**John Barry**

and apologise. The simple act of saying "I'm sorry, I was wrong" has become meaningless. Or even downright risky.

When an accident happens apportioning blame becomes the main issue. We hesitate to extend sympathy or an apology in case it is misconstrued in the ensuing legal battle as an admission of guilt. It seems the law has put a stranglehold on common courtesy.

negligence in operations and for additional illnesses contracted while in hospital. Schools are increasingly being sued by teachers for stress-related illnesses. Students are suing exam boards for errors in the marking of papers. Parents sue schools for allowing their children to play truant and consumers sue manufacturers for goods which they themselves have broken.



apology was not enough.

A simple, heartfelt apology, it seems, has become an endangered species. Western culture has evolved into a society of individuals who seem unwilling to admit their wrongs. People are unwilling to be accountable for their actions and to own up to their mistakes

We have become a 'compensation culture' in which even a trivial mishap can lead to a formal complaint and legal action. Today, people are suing their workplace for industrial injuries more than ever before. Growing numbers of patients are suing doctors and hospitals for

What will be the eventual outcome of all this? Gone are the days of the stiff upper lip when we greeted every misfortune with a steadfast stoicism. So much of this misery could be avoided with a simple apology. There is no need to become a 'doormat' but surely there is a 'middle way' between



# f an apology

total passivity and aggression and revenge.

## A culture of forgiveness

A culture that cannot accept an apology becomes one where there can be no genuine forgiveness or closure of grievances. The result is a world of anger and frustration. How many of the intractable international situations today are the result of small quarrels that have grown out of all proportion? How much conflict could be avoided if only an apology could

express concern for individuals injured in an accident, for fear they became victims of expensive law suits. To help create a climate in which an apology can be offered and accepted, the Californian State Legislature passed a law to the effect that expressing concern for an individual injured in an accident was not a statement of culpability. Expressing compassion and remorse, however, are not things we can legislate. They must be things that we need to nurture in our hearts.

if peace in the heart is ever to be achieved.

An apology does not necessarily absolve the wrongdoer of the responsibility, or prevent the victim from seeking just compensation. But it does alter the climate in which these things happen.

Our feelings often lead us astray. It is not easy to stay calm and controlled when things go wrong. Quite understandably we feel angry, frustrated and inconvenienced. This is human nature but we can not allow our feelings to dictate how we should behave. We need not apologise if it is not our fault. But it is always wise to control how we conduct ourselves. An emotional tirade does not ultimately alleviate any volatile situation. Many a minor problem has become a major incident when those involved lost self control in the heat of the moment.

Forgiveness lies at the heart of Christianity and is essential if peace is to be restored to broken relationships. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God," said Jesus (Matthew 5:9).



be made, and accepted?

The modern world has long championed the cause of encouraging children to fight for their rights. Society, however, would be more balanced if we also taught children to accept their own wrongdoing. This can only be achieved by allowing our children, on a regular basis, to witness our apologies to them and others. Only in this way will a child grow to see apology as an acceptable solution and so is more likely to adopt this stance in the future. This strategy inevitably paves the way for total forgiveness.

A step in the right direction was taken by the State of California, who recognised the problem when a guilty party was afraid to accept blame, show remorse or even

## The solution

The Bible offers sound advice on resolving potential conflicts with grace, integrity and humility. Agree with your adversary quickly, before things get out of hand was Jesus' advice (Matthew 5:25). In all disputes settle the matter promptly, before anger and resentment have time to gain a foothold. Once, Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive those who sinned against him, suggesting seven as a reasonable number. Jesus replies not just 7 but 77 times. He meant of course, not a literal 77, but that there should be no limit to the forgiveness we should give to others (Matthew 18:21-22). To apologise is not always an easy step, but it is a necessary one

Apology and forgiveness should be a natural, instinctive part of our lives. The Lord's Prayer asks God to "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." If we want to be forgiven for our wrongs we in turn must forgive others. If God is willing to forgive us, the least we can do is forgive others for the wrongs they have done us.

To apologise and forgive is such a deceptively simple philosophy. Most reasonable people would agree that it is the right approach. But what a difference it would make if we actually did it. □

# Why d

**T**HE STORY GOES that there was an old man in a village bringing his young son along to find a buyer for his small donkey. Soon they were on their way to town. When the father rode the donkey, a young man passing by said, “What a selfish old man, he should let the poor boy ride.”

When the father let the young son ride, one old man seeing the father walking beside the donkey remarked, “What a shameful brat, letting the poor old father walk.” When they both walked with the donkey, a passer-by laughed, commenting, “How silly to walk when you could ride.” And when they both rode on the small donkey, someone else shook his head in disbelief and uttered, “Poor, poor donkey.”

Finally, the old man and the son decided to tie the legs of the donkey, slinging it over a pole, and carry it on their shoulders. A crowd soon gathered to see the strange, amusing and unbelievable sight. While crossing a bridge, the hooting, the cheering and the loud laughter frightened the donkey. The donkey, panic-stricken, brayed and struggled to be free. It broke loose, but unfortunately fell into the river and drowned!

The moral of my story? Don't let the opinion of others cast doubt as to what we believe or do.

## What is doubt?

To doubt means to be uncertain, unsure, perplexed, irresolute, indecisive, skeptical and suspicious. Doubt is a state of mind questioning and wavering between faith and unbelief. A person in doubt is of “two minds, vacillating between opinions, and unable to ‘make up’ one’s mind. The Chinese proverb for doubt, or irresolution, pictures a person “stepping his foot on two boats.”

## Causes of doubt

Why, then, does our human mind doubt? How does doubt happen? There are many reasons why. Most are intricately related to our knowledge, belief and faith. We



by  
**Yong  
Chin Gee**

all doubt chiefly because we all have uncertainty. Where there is absolute certainty, doubt doesn't exist. It is said that only God and the mad have no doubts! On the other hand, the Bible says God is omniscient. Because He knows anything and everything; He is the source of all knowledge, wisdom and understanding. How can there be doubt when one has absolute knowledge, wisdom and certainty? The mad, one whose mind is malfunctioning, doesn't know who he/she is. The French proverb says: “Who knows nothing doubts nothing!”

## The nature and value of doubt

We live in an imperfect world with a mixture of good and bad. Not everything spoken, written and seen is totally true.

Without the existence of doubts we can easily be misled and deceived. To be ‘skeptical’, in its original Greek meaning, is to “enquire”. Where there is room for doubt, there is also room for enquiry. When confronted with doubt, to investigate, prove, analyse and verify is our natural reaction, and our responsibility.

So to doubt can have its plus points. All doubts are not necessarily destructive, harmful or even sinful. If, however, doubt can counter lies, falsities and deceptions, it can also turn against truth as well. Doubt is therefore a two-edged sword which can cut both ways. We need to proceed with caution.

When members of the “Flat-Earth Society”, for example, finally come to the understanding, seeing it irrefutably proved by science that the earth is indeed round, not only can their erroneous ideas be put aside, but they can go on to discard God too, for creating a world they now find is not how they imagined He created it. Their doubts can be put to rest, resulting in a positive outcome, but their good conclusions about God's creation can also be discarded.

## Beware of what we doubt

In life it is therefore wise to be able to discern between what doubts are trivial and what are serious. For example, to deliberately use an apparently trivial example, to doubt whether to enjoy a third cup of coffee doesn't matter very much to a healthy person. For a person who suffers serious health problems, the consequences of drinking that third cup can be serious. In such cases, doubt should be taken into serious consideration; a vital question not to be brushed aside or ignored.

It is said that a problem, after all, is only so if it is a dilemma to someone. What is trivial to one person may be a consequential or even a life-threatening question to somebody else. Therefore, we have to be cautious not to dismiss another's doubt based on our own opinion, experience and judgment. We owe ourselves a responsibility to determine the significance of our own doubts.

## Dealing with doubt

To resolve doubt in our own minds, we cannot afford to be in a state of ignorance or confusion. Be diligent and purposeful in seeking to find the answer to resolve that doubt. Scriptures describe a person who doubts as “like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind; he/she is double-minded, unstable in all he/she does” (James 1:6, 8). The Bible encourages us to prove all things and hold fast to what is good, right, and true in order to erase doubts (1 Thessalonians 5: 21).

## Knowledge and doubt

We doubt because we are finite. Even with the best of our understanding, we can never know everything we want and need to know. Zuangzi, the Chinese Taoist philosopher, posed: “If when I was asleep I was a man dreaming I was a butterfly, how do I know when I am awake that I am not a butterfly dreaming I am a man?”

# oubt?

Such a problem is no dream. We are certain of our own existence, of who we are. We may be certain of our own existence because we exist, and thus dismiss any doubt about it. We do not have to question and prove our own existence; to do so is a futile exercise like a dog chasing its own tail. Human knowledge, therefore, has its limit through reasoning.

Take the Biblical example of the Apostle Thomas. Thomas doubted the resurrection of Christ and wanted proof of the event. He said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it" (John 20:24). The risen Christ, instead of condemning Thomas for his doubt, presented Himself for inspection (John 20:25–26). Jesus then

Apostle Thomas shows us that God welcomes skeptics to bring their genuine doubts and honest questions to Him to be settled and resolved.

The opposite of doubt for the Christian is faith. But what is faith? Scripture states that "faith is the assurance, confirmation, the substance we hope for, the evidence, conviction and certainty of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1) Faith in Christianity means true belief and faith in Jesus Christ, and the complete trust in God that He is the truth, the only truth, and nothing but the truth; that He can never lie, and that He is absolutely trustworthy, reliable and dependable in all His promises as written in the Bible.

God points out that "The natural, non-spiritual man does not accept, welcome, or admit in his heart the teachings and revelations of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness or meaningless nonsense to him; and he is incapable of knowing them because they are spiritually discerned, appraised and appreciated. But the spiritual man examines, investigates, inquires into and discerns all things" (1 Corinthians 2:14–15).

Proverbs says, "The mind of the prudent, the discerning, acquires knowledge; the ear of the wise seek it out" (Proverbs 18:15).

Why doubt God? Seek His truth, and we will be set free from all our unreasonable doubts about Him. A Christian worldview looks beyond the realities of the natural universe. In doing so, we gain a spiritual perspective on life by which to guide our daily living. Believing in God changes our outlook on what life truly means. We can gain insight into the truth and purpose of our existence. It frees us from doubts and uncertainties concerning our spiritual destiny.

As a result, we can find tremendous joy, peace, contentment—even silencing those human doubts we have—by motivating us spiritually and physically to live our lives to the fullest. □



## **Belief and doubt**

We can know God not only through His revelation by His creation, but also through His revelation by Jesus Christ, verified in human history and testified in the Scriptures. When we have doubt and are not certain or sure of anything, it is best, wise and prudent to inquire and search for a deeper understanding of the matter.

## **Faith and doubt**

Similar to those doubts which human beings have, have you ever struggled with doubts about God and the Christian faith? Even Christ's disciples did!

remarked, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

God honours the genuine doubts of those who truly, sincerely, and honestly seek Him. He understands that we are human and flawed. Yet His words in the Scriptures are there to point us to the answers to our many questions and doubts. Those who are determined to search for the truth by probing and confronting their doubts and fears will ultimately find faith in God. God promises those who diligently seek Him will receive the help and guidance of His Holy Spirit (John 16:12–16). The incident with the

# Another lo

ONE NIGHT RECENTLY I couldn't sleep, and after an hour or so of tossing and turning I got up and went to the kitchen. I stared into the fridge for a minute or so, then stared into the freezer for a while, and finally into the food cupboard, and then started over. At last, sometime during the third or fourth survey of the fridge, I pulled some leftover meatloaf from behind the milk and made myself a sandwich, and went to see if anything good might be on TV at 2 o'clock in the morning.

Flipping through the channels I ran past a Star Trek rerun, an old M.A.S.H. episode, and a Steam Buggy infomercial. Then I came upon a bespectacled, white-haired preacher who, with furled brow, was pointing threateningly and warning his listeners with an air of authority that they had better "wake up" and start "keeping God's law," including, he emphasised, "God's holy Sabbath day," or they would not be in God's kingdom.

He was scary. He had a string of verses lined up, right out of the Bible, that sounded like God was mad at just about everybody, and that the only way out of the horrible mess we've got ourselves into is to "repent" and "start keeping God's law."

"Oh, you've heard that it's just by faith, but that is not true," he said. "All those preachers are just preaching an empty faith, without meaning. God will not save you if you are not keeping his law."

I wondered just what this preacher counts as "keeping God's law." Does he really mean what he says? Does he mean that even one sin will doom you to hell, regardless of your faith? Just how well does one have to keep God's law in order to be saved? Is, say, 95 per cent good enough? Or does one have to be perfect?

To be fair, he finally admitted that nobody can keep God's law perfectly, "at least not on our own," but with Christ in us keeping the law, he said, we can. I felt sick. This finger-waving professing prophet was telling people that if Christ lives in

by  
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Fezell**

them, then not only can they keep the law of God perfectly, but they must, or they will assuredly not be saved.

Wait a minute.

I would like to point out that no Christians, not even the sober-faced, stone-jawed preacher on the TV screen or the apostle Paul himself, have ever, EVER, finally got to the point, even with Christ living in them, that they no longer sin.

I am baffled as to why the Law Brigade has never seemed to notice that. Or maybe they have, but quickly put it out of their minds, since it doesn't fit their tidy view of how salvation works. Or maybe it's never occurred to them, and they really do believe, that somewhere, somehow, somebody finally, at last, with the Spirit's help, actually overcame all sin and got perfect and died without ever sinning again.

## Only in Christ

The gospel teaches us that "because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4–5). The righteous us—the sanctified us, the perfect us—is a miracle of grace performed by God in Christ. That perfect us is "hidden with God in Christ" and won't be seen by us or anyone else until Christ comes back (Colossians 3:2–3). We do not get perfect in this life by trying really hard, by setting goals for overcoming, by following Preacher Fearmonger's seven-point programme, or any other form of Christian work, jargon or platitude.

We are accounted righteous by God for the sake of Jesus Christ—and Jesus Christ alone—and that is only because God is holy and good and full of grace and loves us and did it, full stop (Colossians

1:19–20). That's why we trust our salvation to Him alone and not to the latest overcoming model. With a sense of peace, I went back to bed and fell fast asleep.

## What must we do?

Salvation is by God's own grace, given freely in spite of our sins for the sake of Jesus Christ, and we experience and enjoy that gift by trusting Him. If we don't trust Him, we don't enjoy the gift He has given



us; if we trust Him, we do. It's that simple.

We don't have to know deep theology, or sign the right statement of faith, or recite the right phrases, or read the right books, or belong to the right club. He is already our Redeemer; He has already redeemed us. All we have to do is trust Him to do what He has already done and to be who He already is.

"But you had better stop sinning!" warns Preacher Ironjaw, who forever seems to be lurking behind the lamp post. Well, when Preacher Ironjaw stops sinning, maybe we can too. But he won't, because he

# ook at faith

doesn't have it in him, and neither do we. And the sooner we figure that out, the sooner we will cast our burdens on Christ and find our true rest in Him.

A crowd beside the Sea of Galilee once asked Jesus, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (John 6: 28–29).

"But my sins!" your weary



conscience protests. Listen, Jesus knows you are a sinner. That's exactly why He died for you. Don't let your sins talk louder than the Creator and Redeemer of the whole universe. Sin and death are done for. Your sins and your death are done for. They are done for because God condemned them and destroyed them and reconciled all things to Himself through the blood of Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:19–20). That's the gospel; that's what the Holy Spirit empowers you to know and believe so you can start resting in Christ instead of worrying so much.

## Not saved by faith

We are saved by grace, by God's own kindness toward us, which He expressed perfectly in Jesus Christ. No work of ours, not even our faith, can save us. Salvation is entirely God's work for us from beginning to end. Our faith is simply the act of accepting what God has already given us even though we didn't deserve it. Faith doesn't cause Him to give it to us. It doesn't convince Him to give it to us. He doesn't even withhold it from us until we have faith; He died for us while we were still sinners, before we ever had any faith (Romans 5:8).

But without faith, we will not, indeed cannot, see, experience and enjoy His gift. In other words, if we don't trust Him, we won't believe Him, which means we won't accept and make use of His gift. And when you don't believe you have something and therefore make no use of it, it amounts to the same thing as not having it. Faith doesn't save us, but without faith, the salvation we have in Christ by God's grace is meaningless to us.

So we lament, "But I'm not sure I have faith." By God's grace, the answer to that concern is not to worry about it. Jesus has enough faith for all of us. He provides not only the obedience and perfection, but also the faith (compare 2 Peter 1:3: "His divine

power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness"). So instead of worrying that we don't have enough faith, we can simply trust Christ to save us in spite of our doubts and weakness. We can trust Him to have for us the faith we need to believe in Him.

We can trust Christ to save us in spite of our sins, in spite of our past, in spite of our ignorance, our fear, our doubt. We can trust Him to be everything for us that God requires, because He is.

"Wait a minute," you say. "You just said we have to have faith, and

then you said if we don't have faith, don't worry about it. What kind of shell game are you playing?"

It's no shell game. It's just that we need to learn to trust in Jesus, not in faith. Listen. When we start analysing our behaviour to see if it is good enough to make God happy, we are playing a losing game, because our behaviour is never that good, for starters.

In the same way, when we start to analyse our faith to see if it is good enough, we have already aced ourselves right out of real faith, which is simply trusting Jesus. Instead, we have set up faith as the new work of salvation, and ruined the whole thing.

That is why, when we start to worry that we don't have enough faith, we should just trust Jesus, whose faith is perfect, to be everything we need for salvation. We trust Him, not our faith. We can set aside our worry about how much faith we have, and remember that we have decided (by God's grace—through the Holy Spirit freeing us and prodding us) to trust Jesus to save us no matter how things look.

## Looks are deceiving

Looks are deceiving. Sometimes things look bad because we feel depressed. Sometimes things look bad because we are plagued by doubt. Sometimes all we can see is our mountain of sins and failures. But we don't trust in looks and feelings; we trust in Jesus Christ. Feeling good about our progress in holy living does not save us. Feeling bad about it does not condemn us. Christ saves us. We trust in Him, not in how things appear to us.

The Bible says that there is nothing that can separate us from Christ's love (Romans 8:31–39). Our worries are no match for His love. Our doubts can't overpower His love. The shortcomings of our church, our pastor, our friends, or our families are no match for his saving power.

The noise, lack of space, and even chaos of our home, which might keep us from the kind of prayer and Bible study we might hear about

others enjoying, cannot keep Christ from saving us. Not even our roller-coaster-style emotional instability can keep Him from making us into His new creation.

When we trust Christ, when we rest in Him, we can quit the futile game of counting up our good deeds and our bad deeds. We can cast all our cares on Him. We can confess, without fear or reservation, all our sins to Him. We can rest in His forgiveness, in His acceptance, in His love.

God has not called us to worry, to fret, to fear (Romans 8:15). The Holy Spirit leads us to courage, to boldness, to confidence in the one who loves us and gave Himself for us. He is on our side (vs. 31–32); why should we worry that He, the very one who is indescribably for us, might somehow be against us? It makes no sense. Yet every time we fall short, it seems, we go through this traumatic worry session that God is going to pound us instead of forgive us.

#### **Sin lies to us**

Sin lies to us in countless ways. It tells us that it is fun. It tells us that we need it, that we deserve it. It tells us it won't hurt us or others. All lies! Once we fall for its lies, though, sin takes off its mask and laughs in our faces while it beats us senseless. And then it starts lying all over again.

But maybe the worst lie of all is when sin tells us that God doesn't like us any more. Don't ever forget: Christ died for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:6, 8). God does not hate sinners. He loves them. That's why He died for them.

Are you a sinner? What a surprise! Well then, sinner, God loves you. And He loves you right in the midst of your sinfulness; in fact, it is right there in your sinfulness that His greatest display of love took place on the cross.

That means that when we confess our sins, we are not begging for God to do something that He might not otherwise do. We are, in a word, celebrating the forgiveness He has already given us. We admit our need and then celebrate the restoration of fellowship we have with God through Jesus Christ. We celebrate our friendship with God, who loved us and saved us, coming to us in our sinfulness and taking it away. (And in the joy of such celebration of God's love and grace toward us sinners, we likewise forgive those who have

sinned against us.)

#### **Trust His mercy**

When we trust in Christ, we believe He knows what is best for us. That means we listen to what He tells us to do, and we do our best to do it. Still, even though we commit ourselves to live by every word of God, we fail in so many ways. But because we trust in Christ, we do not ever have to despair! We ask forgiveness, in full assurance that we have it, and we get up and try again.

This very process is an exercise of faith, of trusting in the One who both saves us and who is at work in us. As C.S. Lewis wrote: "We learn, on the one hand, that we cannot trust ourselves even in our best moments, and on the other, that we need not despair even in our worst, for our failures are forgiven. The only fatal thing is to sit down content with anything less than perfection" (from *Mere Christianity*, chapter five).

#### **Keeping faith strong**

Faith is not a feeling. It is not an emotion. It is a gift of God that prompts a decision, a decision to trust in Christ no matter how we feel. Sometimes we mistake our emotions for faith, and we think that because we have bright feelings toward God we are full of faith, or that because we are in the dumps we lack faith. But that is a mistake. Faith is not based on moods. It is a gift, ministered to us by the Holy Spirit, and it must be held on to even when the winds of doubt and fear threaten to pull it away.

But it is not usually the wind that causes us to lose faith; winds usually motivate us to hold on tighter. No, it is usually neglect—just setting it down some where and planning to get back to it some time, but rarely getting around to it. That is why Christians make it a point to pray and read the Bible and confess their sins every day, as well as to meet together every week. When we do that, we are reminded of what we believe, and therefore are less likely to let our confidence slip away (see Ephesians 3:12; Hebrews 10:25).

Such constant reinforcement, such practice or exercise, helps our grip on faith remain strong, which is important, because it is only through faith that we can see things the way they really are—

instead of the way they appear to be. The more we let God remind us of the truth, the less inclined we are to believe sin's lies.

Without faith, the lies that sin tells us start to sound logical again. Without faith, we start to think God is angry at us again. Without faith, we start to think salvation comes by good behaviour again. Without faith, we start to forget the real gospel, and that makes us start down either the road of arrogance or the road of despair, depending on how we feel about the way our dimming eyes decide to size up our behaviour.

One way we could describe faith is this: Faith is the Holy Spirit nudging us to believe what is really true in spite of the great pendulum swings in how we feel about things. And what is really true is that God loves us and saved us by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

#### **Faithfulness**

Some Christians think that God ordained before all time some to be saved and the rest to be lost. But the Scriptures tell us that what God has ordained before all time is His own steadfast love, that is, His unswerving covenant faithfulness (Acts 13:32–33). He will see through what He began in Christ before all things (Ephesians 1:9–10), and He will do it because He is faithful, and in spite of our human unfaithfulness (Romans 5:6). In fact, our unfaithfulness becomes the very tool through which God magnificently displays His utter faithfulness (Romans 5:10, 15; Titus 3:3–7).

In Christ, the ever-living God whose word cannot be broken, became, as God in the flesh, the perfectly faithful human for all our sakes, thereby keeping His covenant with humanity from both ends. From God's side, as God, He became and provided everything we needed for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3); from our side, as a human being He became and offered up to God everything human beings needed to be and needed to give to God (Romans 8:1–3). That is why we find our fullness, our true selves, only in our union with Christ, for it is only in our union with Christ that we are truly ourselves as God created us to be (Colossians 3:3–4). □

# The 'in thing' is to be 'out'... for yourself

**T**HE OTHER DAY WE ATTENDED a meeting of our local society to discuss plans for an end of year party. At that meeting there was a young man who turned down almost every suggestion given by others as being "old fashioned" and gave, what he thought were modern suggestions of his own. This particular incident set me thinking about how many things are becoming old fashioned these days, including some good age old values.

The "in thing" these days, is to think of only oneself. Nowadays it generally is "I, me and myself"—what I say or do is most important nothing else matters, everything should centre around me and me alone and I will think of only myself and no one else. This way of thinking seems to be invading every aspect of life especially in our Asian society.

Take the way people drive on our roads. Rarely are drivers content to drive calmly behind other vehicles at a consistent speed. They will blow their horns till you give way even if it means that they will only get one car ahead or they will weave their way in and out raising the blood pressure of many and endangering the lives of several others. The sad part is that you will probably encounter them again just ahead of you at the next signal. They consider themselves to be the only ones in a hurry. Other normally slow drivers will use the opportunity at signals to go to the extreme left or right, both not their lanes, to overtake several cars only to give everyone the trouble of having to overtake them again.

Many of our streets are narrow, requiring careful parking so that others can pass. But, more often than not, people will park haphazardly not caring to make the extra effort to think of others. They will only move when you actually drive up right to their car and toot your horn quite a few times.



by  
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But it isn't just on the road. When standing in line you invariably find people who will try to jump the queue and cause chaos and confusion. Do they think they are the only ones who have important things to do—all others have time to waste?

Gone are the days when you offered your seat to the elderly, infirm or the mothers with small children. Nowadays the trend is to grab seats even if they are assigned to certain groups of people and not meant for you. One could go on and on with situations where inconsideration seems to be the rule of the day. What is really needed is a revival of some of the

peace than in bitterness and strife." Selfishness causes bitterness and strife. Courteousness brings peace.

I think we all can remember the warm feeling we got when someone did something unexpectedly pleasant for us. Let us return the favour whenever we can. Let us remember that a particular opportunity to be thoughtful, if passed by, may not come again. There is a saying, "I shall pass this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do, or any kindness I can show to any human being, let me do it now, let me not defer nor neglect it for I shall not pass this way again."

Thoughtfulness and consideration towards others, benefits not only the recipient but also the benefactor. On his death-bed, out of a lifetime of service and devotion to others, Dr. Frederic Loomis left us this inspiring message, "Stop thinking of yourself and start thinking about other people. You can lighten your load by doing something for someone else. It will keep you from morbid worry and fears...It's the best medicine.

"One of the most important phases of maturing, is that of growth from self centering to an understanding relationship to others...A person is not mature until he has both an ability and a willingness to see himself as one among others and to do unto others as he would have them do to him." (H.A. Overstreet)

Ultimately as William Wordsworth put it, "The best portion of a good man's life is his nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love." Consideration for others is the basis of a good life, a good society.

In Matthew 7:12, Jesus summed up His teaching with this simple statement: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets".

So simple to say. So hard to do. But what a difference it would make. □



age old values, particularly a large dose of some good "old fashioned" courtesy.

Courtesy is thoughtfulness for others. It is the antithesis of selfishness. It demands putting others before self. Life would be much better for all if we all showed a little courtesy towards our fellow man.

For instance, with a little courtesy there could be road discipline. There would be less anger, less stress, fewer accidents would occur and we would lead calmer and healthier lives. As Confucius once said, "It is better to live in

# Why does God

**J**. ROBERTSON MCQUILKIN, a missionary, was approached by a woman facing the trials of old age who asked him, "Why does God let us grow old and weak?" McQuilkin replied after a moment's thought, "I think God has planned the strength and beauty of youth to be physical. But the strength

homesick for our eternal home. If we stayed young and strong and beautiful, we might never want to leave."

I remembered the same question when my Mom visited us last year. I suddenly felt the fear of losing her because I wanted more of her and the time to spend with

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grown shorter or perhaps a little less erect when she stands. She turned 72 on New Year's Day, but I need not worry because I saw that her zest for life remains the same. She has acquired a certain serenity and peaceful countenance which shows contentment. She still enjoys shopping and cooking for the whole family. She would have continued working if circumstances had allowed, but she was forced to retire. I also suspect that she is happier now than at any time in her life knowing that she has made the most of the years God has given her. And now she is ready to enjoy life until her Creator calls her home.

In sharp contrast, my daughter brought home to me the reality that everyone will go through the same process of growing old unless God decides to cut short this temporary life of ours. She was looking at me one day a few months ago when she got the shock of her life noticing several silver strands peeping out of my usually black hair. She said, "You shouldn't have white hair. It shouldn't be there!" I sympathised with her. I felt the same way with my Mom, the same fear I had that she could die any time.

Life for many people in their 40s or 50s is full of anxiety and fear of the future. Menopause sets in, eyes grow dim, muscles grow slack and arthritis attacks so that we are unable to do the things we normally do. That's because our physical bodies are having a hard time obeying what our minds tell them to do. Gnawing fear of being dependent on our children or other people sets a mood for depression, low self-esteem and discouragement. We forget that growing old is a part of our temporary lives and old age will come to us sooner or later. On the other hand, and in compensation, as the years pass, we acquire a wealth of experiences accompanied by a maturing process which moulds us into the



and beauty of old age is spiritual. We gradually lose the strength and beauty that is temporary so we'll be sure to concentrate on the strength and beauty that is forever. And so we'll be eager to leave the temporary, deteriorating part of us and be truly

her. Mom has changed a lot in the two years when we didn't see each other. Her face mirrors her many years of struggle and storms in life. Her skin has dried and wrinkled. She has lost much of her agility, and she seems to have



# let us grow old?

person we are and whom we either like or dislike, depending on the lessons imparted to us by these experiences.

Some of us may be married, separated or widowed (like me), while some may still be single by choice or for some other reason. Regardless of our status, we have our own share of failures, disappointments, frustrations, and difficult trials. Married life for most of us can be and is stressful at times. Family concerns are priorities. Often, as women and mothers, our desires and personal ambitions take a back seat as we take care of the growing needs of our children and spouse. As years pass, people and circumstances change and our priorities have to change too. Our children reach the age of independence and spread their wings, while we go on with life. Some with our spouses. Others face the future alone. Time flies so fast. Suddenly we turn 50! We finally realise that we have no more time on our hands than we need.

Growing old is a part of life and nothing can stop it except physical death, which everyone will experience sooner or later. But the interesting thing about growing old is that a new chapter unfolds which to me feels more of a challenge and exhilaration than a threat. We should rejoice instead of feeling sad. We can now pursue some unfulfilled dreams or explore some hidden or untapped talents to make productive use of our time. "Education is the best provision for old age," according to Aristotle.

Youth has its own benefits, but when one gets old one loses inhibitions and the self-consciousness often experienced by youth. According to the Welsh proverb: youth supposes; age knows. Youth is full of insecurities, doubts and questions—but full of dreams and ambitions as well. While the old know what they want, the young are often

confused and bewildered. So often they want to grow old before their time subjecting themselves to unnecessary frustrations, disappointments and failures ahead of time.

Being middle-aged, too, has many pluses. We can have the luxury of looking back to the lessons of the past and use them as a springboard for a more meaningful present. We can be more committed to serving God



and Him alone than ever before. We sometimes overlook that our Creator is just waiting for us to invite Him into our lives. Revelation 3:20 says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and him with me." Yes, trials come and go. This is a part of life. But these trials give us more reason to seek God. Or stay closer to Him, if we are already in Christ, knowing that He alone holds the key to our future and is responsible for our present.

Every stage of our journey through life offers exciting opportunities to become the person God wants us to be—if we yield to Him and His will. The whole of eternity is ours with Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Our future is to live a life full of Him. Yes, we can look forward to an exciting future, which God is offering each of us. We are as old as we feel we are, or as young as we want to be. A life dedicated and fully committed to God knows neither age limit nor boundaries. He expects us to get involved in His great work, His mission, of revealing Himself and offering salvation to all mankind.

God wants us to accept joyfully each season of life. Whatever our age, it is never too late to commit ourselves and our ways to Him. He gives us strength in our weakness as we grow older. There is much to do even if we're already 50 and over. There is no retirement with God. He wants us to devote our lives and time to Him so that through us He can touch the lives of others. He wants us to serve Him more and more by serving others more and more, to love Him more and more by loving others more and more, and to know Him more and more, as we head into the autumn and winter of our lives.

As we reach the summer of our life, we fearlessly face our daily challenges. When we reach the autumn of our lives, these daily challenges become opportunities for a deeper and intimate relationship with God. And as we feel the approaching winter of our lives, let us spend it by seeking to know God better and better, and by letting His Holy Spirit fill us with His eternal glory, strength and beauty. May the following verses inspire us all as we continue our walk with God:

Only this hour is mine, Lord.  
May it be used for Thee;  
May every passing moment,  
Count for eternity. □

# “I’m so lonely”

Everyone has been through it. You go away to summer camp or start at a new school. You don’t know anyone and you can’t help it: You feel out of place and lonely.

But you don’t have to just sit and suffer—you can take action. We’ve all heard the saying, “If you want friends, be friendly.” But how?

First, think of someone you know who is lonely. Then, think of someone you consider friendly and popular. What is the first thing you notice about each of them?

Lonely people look lonely. It’s written all over their faces. That downcast, I’m feeling-sorry-for-myself expression can be read by anyone.

Friendly and popular people are also easy to spot. Why? Because of their warm, friendly and inviting smiles

## How to get out of loneliness

Step 1: Don’t underestimate the power of a smile. Remember those times when a smile brightened your day and brought you out of the dumps? When

someone smiles at you it makes you feel good about yourself because someone noticed you. It’s like a small, but very special gift.

Something as simple as a smile can mean the difference between success and failure in your personal life. It can affect you later in your professional life. A smile is powerful.

Most importantly, be sincere. Don’t force a smile—smile because you want to smile. Try, as your goal, to make someone else smile. Most people will not smile unless you smile first. So, take the first step and smile.

Step 2: Another way to get away from feeling lonely and sorry for yourself is to think about and encourage others.

In sports, for example, someone trying to be friendly doesn’t make fun of the one on the team with the least ability, but helps him or her develop skills.

Were any of us born star athletes? Were any of us born knowing how to dance, sing, play an instrument or write poetry? Obviously not. We have to be taught those skills by patient, encouraging teachers and friends. Be a friend to others by being willing to help and

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And when you’re in a group, be strong enough to be a leader. When others are picking on someone, don’t join in. You know what it’s like to be picked on—don’t you?

If you say anything, say something encouraging. Find something the person does well and compliment him or her on that. Instead of making fun—make a friend.

As you become more popular and have more and more friends, the tendency is to become too choosy about whom you want as a friend. It’s important to choose your friends wisely, but don’t

avoid others and be guilty of making them feel the loneliness you once felt.

Make contacts with a wide variety of people. Ask your parents to help you organise a beach party, pool party, potluck dinner, a picnic or a camp-out. Figure out a way to get teens in your area together. Talk to your minister or

youth counsellor. They might have good ideas for you.

A final word of caution: Don’t brag, boast or put yourself above others. A true friend is humble, not conceited, and doesn’t have to prove how good he or she is.

Loneliness may be caused by circumstances, such as moving to a new home. But loneliness is cured, not by changing your environment, but by giving to other people. No matter who you are, or where you live, you don’t have to be alone. □



encourage them. You’ll be amazed at the friends you win.

Step 3: Notice another attribute about friendly people—they and their friends always seem to have fun. If you have fun (no matter what you’re doing) other people will want to be around you.

Developing a hobby or joining a club is a good way to develop friendships with others who have the same interests as you. Look for opportunities to ask people about their interests. Be interested in people.

To obtain complete trust from someone is to obtain an invitation into their soul.

**Wayne Cheng**

If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favourable.

**Seneca (4 B.C.-65 A.D.)**

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

**Martin Luther King, Jr.**

If you don't design your own life plan, chances are you'll fall into someone else's plan. And guess what they may have planned for you? Not much.

**Jim Rohn**

Looking back, we see with great clarity, and what once appeared as difficulties now reveal themselves as blessings.

**Dan Millman**

Opportunity may knock only once, but temptation leans on the doorbell.

**Unknown**



**HEALTH WATCH ... LAUGH IT UP**

Laughter may not be the best medicine, but it is surprisingly effective. While the idea has been around for a while, more studies are confirming the anecdotal evidence. In a study published in Diabetes Care, researchers reported that people with type 2 diabetes had a smaller rise in blood glucose when they watched a comedy programme versus a boring lecture on television. A team at the University of Maryland found that people who laughed often and were able to see the humour in situations were less likely to develop heart disease. Researchers say people who laugh tend to be healthier people. In study after study, hostility and anger are associated with disease, and humour with health.

This is especially true when you're laughing it up with friends. Research on support groups has shown that the effects of laughter are magnified when it takes place in a social setting.

Tell me and I will forget, show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand.

**Chinese Proverb**

One kind word can warm three winter months.

**Japanese Proverb**

Life is the sum of your choices.

**Albert Camus (1913-1960)**

When one gives whatever one can without restraint, the barriers of individuality break down. It no longer becomes possible to tell whether it is the student offering himself to the teacher, or the teacher offering himself to the student. One sees only two immaculate beings, reflecting one another like a pair of brilliant mirrors.

**Lao Tzu**

When you praise somebody, what matters most is that you genuinely appreciate him or her. If you think that person means nothing to you, holds no expectation or worth for you, any words of praise you

might contrive out of a sense of duty will accomplish nothing.

**Konosuke Matsushita**

*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.*

**THE PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI**

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,  
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled  
as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand;  
to be loved, as to love;  
for it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

# Is there any hope after an affair?

**C**ASE #1: Mike King (not his real name) was sexually abused by a teenage female babysitter when he was two years old. Because of this abuse, Mike developed a great interest in female nude bodies at his early age. He started looking at pornographic magazines when he was 11 years old. He always felt a lot of guilt and shame for what he was doing. Several times in youth retreat camps, he repented of his sexual sins, vowing not to do it anymore. Time and again, however, he would go back to the old lifestyle of indulging in pornographic magazines and later in promiscuous relationships, as he got older. Even after he married, had children and became a counsellor, his sexual addiction got worse and worse. He just could not stop. Later he was caught having an affair with the secretary in the counselling centre. He was fired from his job. His wife of 15 years could not believe it and was completely shocked to find herself having to face challenges she was unprepared for. The couple got the necessary help right away. Through the help of friends, family members, counsellors, and many prayers, Mark was healed of his addiction and was able to rebuild trust and relationship with his wife. They became a more intimate couple than ever before.

Case #2: Eddie Lee (not his real name) met May Lin (not her real name) in America when she came to visit her sister. She later married Eddie mainly as a way to change her visa status, which would not otherwise allow her to stay. She later gave birth to two girls in two years. Since Eddie had a very good job, May was able to stay at home to take care of the children. Life seemed to be simple and peaceful. But deep in her heart, she felt that her husband did not understand and appreciate her. She felt deep dissatisfaction with her marriage, thinking frequently what her life would be like if she had married someone else. When they had conflicts, they did not know how to resolve them. One day she happened

to meet the new neighbour, Mark Wong, who had just moved from another city. It started out as a friendly and innocent conversation but gradually May began to share with him her frustration and disappointment with her marriage. Before they knew it, they had gone down the slippery slope towards an affair. Since Mark Wong worked at night, they were able to spend a lot of time together when May's husband was working. Eventually, May's husband, Eddie, found out about their affair through e-mails. He even caught them going out together during the lunch hour. At the suggestion of May's parents, this couple went through counselling and received a lot of support from family members and friends but they still ended up in divorce.

These two cases looked different from their content, but the damage caused is the same. The question is: In Case #1, why the couple was able to overcome the difficulties along the path of healing and rebuild the trust in marriage? Why did the couple in Case #2 fail to recover from the damage of an affair? And why could they not have reconciliation after an affair?

Before we analyse these two cases, let's first answer the question: What makes an affair so seductive to people? There are at least three components which make an affair so seductive: (a) An affair is fueled by the idea of childhood magic that makes people oblivious to the outside world except for the bubble fantasy they have created; (b) The affair stirs up their adolescent sexuality that seems to lie dormant. They are totally infatuated and consumed by each other; and (c) The excitement of meeting the affair partner in a secret place also adds up to the pure fun and pure passion of the moment.

They may know that what they are doing is not good for them and for their families. But no one can reason with them. They may



by  
**George &  
Linda Kuo**

have their own reasons and even try to justify why they continue to do what they do. Also, the fantasy world which is created will not last since it is not real. Eventually they will come to face the reality of the damage caused by an affair.

For an affair to happen it needs certain kinds of people and a secret place. For those who do not have a deep sense of commitment to the marriage, those who do not have a clear sense of proper boundaries, and those who do not know how to satisfy the deep longing in their hearts, an affair will easily happen when a willing partner shows up. For example, when a man who had an affair with a female colleague at a professional conference was asked why he did it, his answer was: I did not plan to have an affair with anyone when I went to the conference. It just happened. When he was asked: Then why did you go into her hotel room alone when she invited you to have a cup of coffee? He could not come up with a good answer. This man is like the proverbial "ox going to the slaughter" or "bird darting into the snare." Even though this man did not plan to have an affair, he did not have a strategy how not to get into an affair either. Without a deep commitment to the marriage, without a strategy and without boundaries, it is easy for anyone to fall into an affair.

Now we are ready to go back and analyse these two cases. In Case #1, when Mrs. King learned of her husband's affair, her first reaction was to face the reality and work with her husband along the difficult path of recovery. The husband was sent to a place where he could receive treatment for his sexual addiction. He joined a support group there with those who were on the same path of recovery. In the context of this community he was able to repent and be healed of his addiction. He received a lot of support from the group and prayer support



from friends and family members. From the beginning Mrs. King decided to forgive her husband. She considered this life event as a wake-up call for her to look into her own personal issues. She also joined a support group with those spouses going through the same journey. She re-visited some of her own unresolved issues from her family of origin. As she and her husband shared their issues from their respective families, they began to re-connect as a couple in a deeper level. Mike's true repentance really moved his wife. He repented of the betrayal he had done to her. He acknowledged the hurt and sorrow he had inflicted on her. He received complete grace and forgiveness from her. Both believed that this marriage was very important to them. They were willing to do what was necessary to walk through the journey of recovery. The result was really truly sweet.

In Case #2, there were two factors which were fatal to the reconciliation process. The first was the fact that the wife did not or could not stop the on-going affair even though she promised the counsellor that she would stop the affair in order to continue the counselling. The second one was that the husband could not or would not forgive his wife from the beginning and during the counselling process. Since both parties refused to do their

parts to rebuild the trust in the marriage, their relationship got worse and worse with more fights and conflicts. Their relationship got so bad that the wife had to take the children with her and separate from her husband. Despite the help from friends, pastors and counsellors, this couple eventually had to go through the path of divorce.

To answer the question: Is there any hope after an affair? That depends. Two things need to happen before there is hope for reconciliation after an affair. The perpetrator needs to stop the affair right away and the victim needs to have the grace to forgive. It may be humanly impossible to forgive an affair partner, but with God's help it can be done. The recovery process can be long and difficult. It will have tears, depression, and other strong negative emotions along the path. It is going to take a lot of grace, love, and patience from both parties to go through this difficult journey.

We cannot neglect the damage an affair can do to the children. Despite the outcome of the marriage after an affair, the parents need to talk to their children and resolve the issues caused by an affair. Counselling sessions may be needed to help the children process and be healed of their hurt and pain.

Here are several suggestions to prevent an affair from happening.

First, we need to understand that the ultimate purpose of marriage is for husband and wife to become "one flesh" as stated in Genesis 2: 24. One flesh means one in body, mind and spirit. How can we have that kind of oneness when there is another woman (or man) in the marital relationship? We need to have clear boundaries that we will not cross in order to protect our marriage. For example, a married man should avoid going out to have tea, coffee, or dinner with a female friend or colleague alone, or share his emotions or struggles in his own marriage with a female friend. Be diligent in applying these principles when we work closely with a colleague of the opposite sex in a team or serve in a ministry together. We need to have a plan to spend our energy and money on our marital relationship by attending family/marriage workshops, marriage enrichment retreats, taking courses, reading books, taking vacations alone without children, having a marriage mentor, etc.

Those who have had an affair need to reflect and take inventories of their lives. Ask the question: What is I am longing for? Have I learned any lesson from this difficult journey? Hopefully, we realise that only God can fulfill that longing in our heart. Once we have that close connection with God, we can then build an intimate relationship with our spouse. □

# Bumper cross

**A**BOUT TWO YEARS AGO, for several consecutive weeks, *The Star* newspaper printed the Bumper crossword puzzle. A brand new car could be won every week. The cars ranged from a Proton to a BMW. It was definitely a fantastic offer considering that it only cost a few dollars (5 days' newspapers and 1 postcard) and a few hours of work. Every week the newspaper announced the winner of the brand new car.

Several thousand people sent in their entries each week. Only one, however, could win the grand car prize; others had to try their luck on the next puzzle. Those who won those grand prizes were all smiles. They had every reason to be happy. Why not?

Those who had not been successful probably didn't feel all that bad because they lost only a few dollars and a few hours of their time. No big deal.

## Try this magazine's crossword puzzle!

So, in this issue, we are printing a crossword (not a crossword) puzzle which also offers fantastic prizes! It is called 'crossword puzzle' because all the answers are based on a crossword. The rules for this puzzle are not difficult. Everyone is entitled to enter. You can take as much as time as you need to finish the puzzle. Best of all, everyone who enters this contest wins the grand prize.

Yes, you stand to win. There are no gimmicks, No letdowns, and no fine print. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Why not give it a try?

Your prize will be presented to you by a very, very important dignitary at a place and time of his choosing. The presentations will be carried out in great pomp and splendour.

Don't cheat! The solutions to the puzzle are given at the end of this article. So, please do the

puzzle and check your answers with the solutions given. If you really get stuck, it's okay to peek at the answers. You will not be disqualified! The only important rule is that you must be honest about yourself and believe in the correct solutions. Ready?

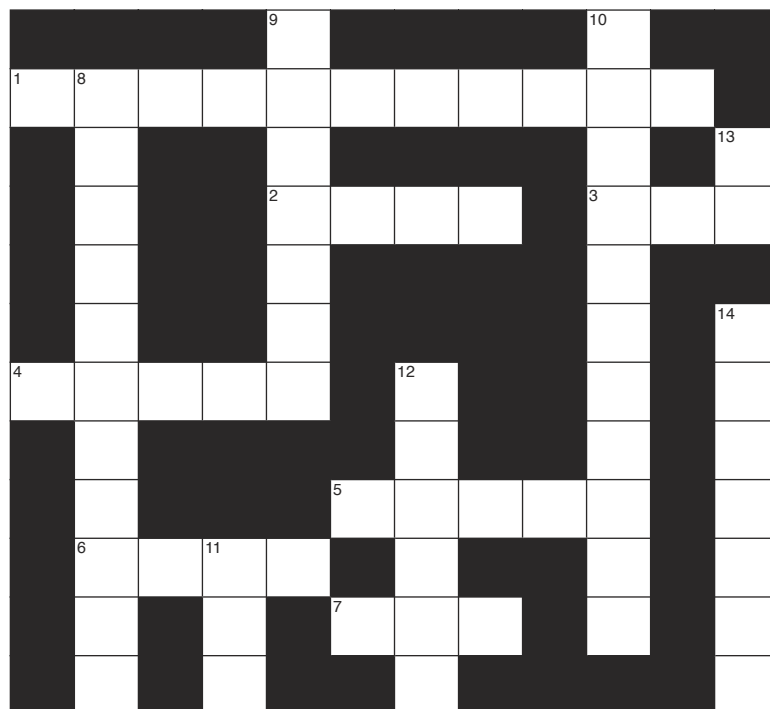
### Fantastic offers

If you have followed through the clues, you will have recognised that all the answers point to Jesus Christ. Yes, Jesus Christ, the very Son of God who created all things, and who came to the earth as a human being. He was born of the Virgin Mary in a miraculous way by the power of the Holy Spirit. He was fully man (son of man) and fully God (Son of God). As a



by  
**Dr. P.  
Sellappan**

human being, Christ preached the gospel and did all kinds of good work and eventually died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins. It is our sins that crucified Him. He was willing to exchange death with us because He loves us so much. His death is a demonstration of His love for us. After three days in the tomb, He was resurrected (raised) to eternal life by His Father. And because He paid our sins, we can go boldly to God to confess our sins and ask Him to cleanse (forgive) us. No matter how great or terrible our sins, God is ready to forgive us, as He is our merciful High Priest. Like the father of the prodigal son, our Father is waiting eagerly to forgive our sins and lavish His love upon us. He wants



### Across

- One of the worst forms of punishment.
- He is often called the \_\_\_\_ of God.
- Many worship him.
- He carried it before he died.
- We are saved by it.
- \_\_\_\_ could not hold him.
- Our \_\_\_\_ killed him.

### Down

- Another word for "risen".
- He is the only person with this quality.
- We can receive \_\_\_\_ if we accept him.
- He also took the form of a \_\_\_\_.
- He was born to a \_\_\_\_.
- This division of time came after his death.
- He came as the \_\_\_\_ of the world.

# word puzzle

us to be His sons and daughters and have an intimate and joyful relationship with Him now and for all eternity. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God sacrificed for us. He is also our true Friend who can be relied upon absolutely. Yes, He is all that we need.

Here are some of what God offers us through Jesus:

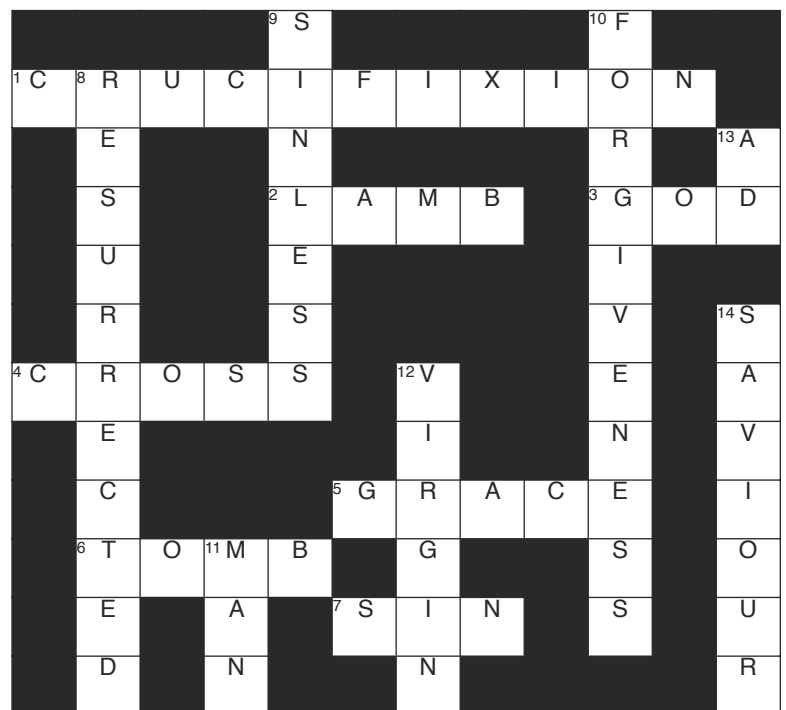
- He grants us repentance.
- He forgives our sins.
- We are reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ.
- He adopts each of us as His son or daughter.
- He is our true Friend who will never forsake us.
- He makes us holy and righteous.
- He gives us eternal life—life with no ending.
- He gives us pleasures for ever more; no more tears, pain, sorrow, suffering, or death.

These are truly fantastic offers. Indeed these are the best offers anyone can have. How can we possibly refuse them? None of the winners of the cars in the Bumper crossword contest refused to accept the car prize.

Unlike the crossword puzzle which offered limited prizes, our crossword puzzle offers incredibly fantastic prizes. Yes, God loves you and He is offering all these and more. He is waiting for you to claim all these wonderful

gifts. So just reflect on the answers to the crossword puzzle. The only condition is that you must believe with all your heart that these solutions are true. Yes, this crossword puzzle is relatively simple. You can win! ☐

## Answers to crossword puzzle



## What our readers say:

How much I appreciate your magazine only God knows. It's a great info deliverer and I am enlightened by it's well informed and down to earth explanation on many divine topics.  
S Poobalan  
Ipoh

The PLAIN TRUTH magazine is an exceptional magazine and I am glad to be included in your mailing list. To this day I'm still using some of the articles from your magazine



for teaching and reference.  
Anonymous

I have received your latests issue. Thank you very much. This copy was posted to my address and this time it is not lost. Enclosed please find some quotes which I have collected in the past. I hope they are suitable for the magazine.  
Wong Chee Wah

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