

THE Plain Truth ASIA

PP 12578/4/2005

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Dec-Jan 2005

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sound mind
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Heard any good excuses lately?

Excuses, excuses. What's your favourite excuse?
 "I forgot."
 "I didn't have time."
 "I didn't understand what you meant."

Probably all of us, at one time or another, have heard or have come up with some pretty outlandish reasons for avoiding responsibility. And that's just what an excuse is—a flimsy reason for not doing something we should, or for doing something wrong. Excuses come in handy in all kinds of situations—failing to take care of a household chore, forgetting something we promised to do for a friend, not turning in a school assignment, explaining how something got broken. A friend once had an elementary school teacher who had heard so many wild excuses from students not turning in their homework that he threatened to write a whole book of them:

- "My hair hurt."
 - "My little sister ate it."
 - "I lost it."
 - "My grandmother died."
- (This last one might have worked, but the student who used it had four grandmothers die over the course of the school term!)

Then there's the guy who turns down an opportunity to help someone and says, "I gave at the office." Or the person who passes up a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity by saying, "Maybe next time." Another friend, who will remain unnamed, passed up an invitation to lunch one day, saying she had to eat her liver (you figure that one out).

A lion in the street

The Bible records some humorous excuses that pointed up character flaws in the people who used them. Proverbs 26:13–16 tells about a lazy man who refused to go to work because he claimed a lion was out

in the street waiting to pounce on him! He stayed in bed so long he resembled a door turning on its hinges: "The sluggard says, 'There is a lion in the road, a fierce lion roaming the streets!' As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who answer discreetly."

While Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments

The calf 'just came out' by itself? Moses didn't buy that for a minute. Blaming others for our own faults is a common pitfall when things are going wrong.

"It's not my fault"

When God asked Adam why he had eaten the fruit He specifically commanded him not to eat, Adam replied, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."² In other words, it was the woman's fault—according to Adam. But what did

the woman have to say? The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." Oh, so it was the serpent's fault? And God made the serpent, so it was God's fault! That was the position Adam and Eve took. We use a similar phrase today—have you ever seen somebody make a bad mistake or break something, only to say, "Look what you made me do!"? It's another excuse. Christ told a parable about a man who had received one talent to work with, but failed to produce anything with it. When his Lord asked him why, he had this lame

reply: "Master," he said, "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground."³

Ridiculous? Yes. But the result wasn't a bit funny—especially to the servant. Let's remember to forget about making excuses—weak, unfounded reasons for our failures, and live up to our responsibilities. Rudyard Kipling wrote, "We have 40 million reasons for failure, but not a single excuse." □



from God, his brother Aaron made a golden calf for the children of Israel to worship. Notice Aaron's response when Moses confronted him about this sin: "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewellery, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"¹

¹ Exodus 32: 22–24

² Genesis 3:12

³ Matthew 25: 24–25

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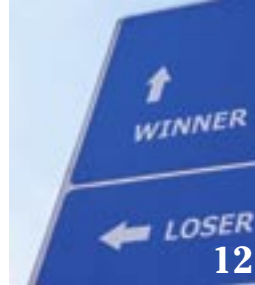
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“Love me m

The heat of the afternoon sun was unbearable. The wind carried the sand into his eyes. It was only the first day of his three-day journey but it seemed to be the longest journey of his life.

Abraham was a seasoned traveller. Originally from Ur in the valley of the Euphrates River, he had travelled great distances from Haran to Canaan¹ and as far south as Egypt.

God had promised him and his wife, Sarah, a son in their old age. Sarah who was past child-bearing age laughed at the prospect. Abraham himself, earlier on, had also laughed.² God's promise was to make their descendants through this son inherit land in the area God would show him later. Abraham had stepped out in faith to follow God's lead, not knowing where his life would lead to.

Sarah thought she was doing God a favour by telling Abraham to marry her servant, Hagar, and have children through her. Abraham and Hagar had a son but this was not the son God had promised to Sarah.³

Later, amazingly, Abraham and Sarah did have a son. There was great rejoicing as Abraham began to see how God would work out His promise.⁴

There was also a promise that all nations would be blessed through a descendant of Abraham.⁵

72 hours to Moriah

When things seemed to be taking shape, God gave a strange instruction to Abraham: “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, *whom you love*, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”⁶

The three-day journey to Moriah gave Abraham much time to think. Why was God asking him to sacrifice his son, the apple of his eye, this son through whom God would fulfil his promises to Abraham and Sarah?⁷ Was it because he had disobeyed God in some way? Or because both Sarah and Abraham had laughed in disbelief when God had spoken

by
Ben David

about having a son in their old age? Had he held anything back in his love and worship of the great God? Was this God like other pagan gods who demanded their devotees to sacrifice their children in worship? Humanly speaking, Abraham probably had questions and doubts as the journey snaked through desert hill and vale for what seemed like an eternity.

On the third day, when Abraham from a distance finally spotted the place God had in mind, he told his two servants to remain where they were. He took his son, Isaac, and the things needed for the sacrifice and headed for the spot. On reaching the place he carefully laid down the wood to make an altar. His heart must have been going through immense pain and anguish beyond words. It was only in a matter of minutes that his beloved son would become history, killed by the hand of his loving father.

Isaac asked Abraham where the sacrificial animal would come from and he replied that God would provide. Scripture records that Abraham bound Isaac to the altar. This indicates that Isaac was a willing participant to God's instruction.

Shadowing the moment of truth

As Abraham placed the knife on the lad, he was stopped by an angel who spoke on behalf of God: “Do not lay a hand on the lad. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”⁸

The sacrifice at Moriah was completed with a ram provided by God. Isaac was not the sacrifice but he mirrored the actual sacrifice.

Abraham was willing to give up the son that he loved, prepared to kill him with his own hand. Isaac was willing to give up his life, his dreams and hopes to fulfil his father's wish to obey God's command. In doing so, Isaac also honoured God. God had not asked of Abraham what He Himself was

not prepared to do. In His plan of salvation, Jesus was slated for death from the foundation of the world.⁹

Abraham and Isaac in every sense of the word acted out on Moriah what God and His Son would endure at Golgotha.

Almost 2,000 years after Abraham was tested, God fulfilled His promise of making a way for everyone to be saved from sin and eternal death. “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”.¹⁰ God did not spare His son from physical pain and death. He accepted the pain and suffering and sent His beloved son to die in our place.

How would Jesus fulfil God's promise of salvation if Jesus were to die? He remained sinless to the end. He took upon Himself the sin of the world. He paid the ransom. His blood cleanses us of sin. God honoured His work and resurrected Him to eternal life, restoring the honour, glory and position He had before He had taken human form.

The best of times

Charles Dickens began his classic novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, with the line: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times”. This could aptly describe the time when the greatest announcement went out: “He is risen!”¹¹ Jesus' death and resurrection is everything to the Christian faith and practice.¹²

The next few weeks on numerous occasions He appeared and then disappeared. He had appeared first to the two women, then to the apostle Peter, the other apostles, to two disciples at Emmaus, and one time before 500 people.

The worst of times

What news could be better than the resurrection of Jesus? But Peter and the apostles did get discouraged and confused. Why did the Master keep appearing and disappearing at random? What was His plan?

ore than...?"

They did not yet understand. One morning, Peter said: "I'm going fishing!" The others chose to follow him. The fishing trip was a failure in that they caught nothing. The next morning Jesus stood on the shore and called out to them. He told them to cast their nets again on the right side of the boat. They did, not knowing that it was Jesus speaking to them. This time the net was full of fish. The apostle John then recognised it was Jesus on the shore, and told Peter so.



Peter swam ahead of the ship to shore and drew the net to land. He, a fisherman by profession, counted the fish. One hundred and fifty three! After they had dined, Jesus asked Peter: "...do you truly love me more than these?" Jesus asked this question three times, and three times Peter answered: "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."¹³

Jesus was referring to godly love while Peter was thinking of brotherly love.¹⁴

Peter's own journey

In one of his early encounters with Jesus, Peter exemplified an attitude that was after Jesus' own heart.¹⁵ Peter was wholehearted in

his passion for Jesus.¹⁶ But in his weakness he fulfilled the prophecy of Jesus that he would deny his Master three times on the night of Jesus' arrest. No man would ever want to deny his Maker and look him in the eye but Peter did.¹⁷ He wept bitterly, experiencing the mournful attitude that Jesus had talked about in His Sermon on the Mount.¹⁸

Peter had gone through many experiences with Jesus, but he matured and became transformed as he allowed the Spirit of Christ to lead him. Peter began to understand the love Jesus was talking about, godly love, as when he wrote in his epistle: "... make every effort to add to your faith, goodness... knowledge, self-control... perseverance, godliness, and to brotherly kindness, love (the godly type)."¹⁹

Peter recognised that Jesus died *for* our sins so that we might also die *to* sins and live for righteousness.²⁰ The death of Jesus is an expression of God's love for us. It also forms the foundation of our transformation. Peter likens us to living stones being built into a spiritual temple to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.²¹

Peter taught that loving God involves walking in faith. He commended those who loved Jesus even though they had not seen Him in person.²² This world is visible, very real and can be attractive, even enticing. It is often easier to love what we can touch or see than to love the invisible God. It helps to keep in mind that worldly circumstances are temporary.

To love Jesus more than this world and what it has to offer may be a difficult goal, but it is the only worthwhile one.

The cost of discipleship

Jesus spoke about loving Him more than loving our families or ourselves. This is the cost of our discipleship and worship in

Christ.²³

Jesus gave Himself for us. He paid the cost with all that He had. There is no greater calling than to love Him.²⁴

The task may seem daunting, virtually impossible, but it remains our calling. We have help from the Spirit of Christ to overcome what we are, and allow the love of God to work in us. His Spirit can empower us to love Him in ways we could not imagine.²⁵ With God, all things are possible.

Loving Jesus more than ourselves does not depend on pursuing long-term goals with a list of do's and don'ts, or a list of all our sins, weaknesses and habits that need to be overcome. Loving Jesus more does not mean we need to be perfect or sinless in this life. Human nature is frail and deceptive at best.

Jesus shows us how

Jesus did not leave us without help. He showed us how. We need to seek Him first as He is the King of God's kingdom, and He is the righteousness of God. Putting Jesus first and walking in faith daily requires only small steps. We seek God's will daily, and cling to Him tenaciously, as Abraham and Peter did. We set our hearts on things above, and submit all our plans, hopes and dreams to Him. We work with His Spirit daily to be transformed by bringing every thought to the captivity of Christ.²⁶ By recognising who we are, the temple of God, we gratefully and joyfully offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to do God's will in us. God knows our hearts just as He knew Abraham's and Peter's. Let's take our journey of faith in small daily "bites" being faithful in little things. Our prayer time is no longer a chore. Bible Study is enriching. Praising God in worship and adoration is a daily joy.

As we grow in faith and love, our transformation will be reflected in the way we live. Our conscience will, one day soon, be one with Jesus. □

¹ Genesis 12:1, 5, 10

² Genesis 18:12; 17:17

³ Genesis 17:21

⁴ Genesis 21:1-3, 8

⁵ Genesis 18:18

⁶ Genesis 22:2

⁷ Genesis 17:19

⁸ Genesis 22:12

⁹ Revelation 13:8

¹⁰ John 3:16

¹¹ Luke 24:6-8

¹² 1 Corinthians 15:17, 19

¹³ John 21:3-17

¹⁴ Calvin Miller, 2000. *Into the Depths of God*, Bethany House. p 169

¹⁵ Luke 5:8; 18:13-14

¹⁶ Luke 22:33

¹⁷ Luke 22: 60-62

¹⁸ Charles Swindoll, 1996. *Simple Faith*, Word Publishing. p 31

¹⁹ 2 Peter 1:5-7

²⁰ 1 Peter 2:24

²¹ 1 Peter 2:5

²² 1 Peter 1:5, 7-9

²³ Luke 14:26

²⁴ John 17:9-10, 26

²⁵ 2 Timothy 1:7

²⁶ Matthew 6: 8-13, 33-34; Luke 9:23

Do you see what God sees?

Do we see what God sees? Chances are we don't. God is a spiritual being and God sees with spiritual eyes. We are mere human beings and we see with human eyes.

Human perspective

Human beings tend to judge others based on how they look, what they wear, what cars they drive or what houses they live in. They then form opinions of other people based on what their senses can perceive.

If you had lived in Jesus' day, you might have looked up to the group of religious leaders known as the Pharisees. These Pharisees were considered 'holy men' and they seemed to enjoy their position in society. They loved the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues.¹ They made sure their religious symbols and clothing were obvious enough to attract everyone's attention. To outward appearances they seemed to be everything a religious leader should be.

No wonder they were upset when Jesus Christ said that they were like whitewashed tombs that looked beautiful on the outside, but on the inside were full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. On the outside they appeared to people as righteous but on the inside they were full of hypocrisy and wickedness.²

God's perspective

God is more interested in what is going on inside. He looks at the heart, and understands every motive behind our every thought.³ Our thoughts are not God's thoughts and neither are our ways God's ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's thoughts higher than our thoughts and His ways higher than our ways.⁴

The Pharisees were very fussy about getting their religious practices 'just right'. They would go to great pains to make sure they gave tithes on even the smallest amount of herbs. Well, it's not wrong to be careful, but Christ reminded them



by
Tan Ten Lee

that whereas this should have been done, they should not neglect to practise internal virtues such as justice, mercy and faithfulness.⁵ He likened the Pharisees to hypocrites because they cleaned the outside of the cup and dish (figuratively speaking) but inside they were full of greed and self-indulgence. They were like people who washed only the outside of a cup. Jesus told them that if they cleaned the inside, the outside would also be clean.⁶ God, who sees the inside, is more concerned with the inner character of people rather than the outward appearance.



An Old Testament illustration

This is a hard lesson to learn. We are naturally impressed by the external appearance. During the time of Samuel in the Old Testament era, God was accepted as Israel's king. But then Israelites decided they wanted to be like the nations around them so they requested a human king. God first allowed Saul, the tallest and most impressive man in the nation to be their first human king. Saul, however, lacked character and discipline, and, after a rather unhappy and unsuccessful reign, he was killed in battle. But even before he died, God told Samuel that He had rejected Saul as king and wanted Samuel to choose one of the sons of a man called Jesse to

replace him.⁷

God then sent Samuel to the town of Bethlehem where Jesse and his family lived. When Samuel saw Eliab, Jesse's eldest son, he thought, based on what he was seeing, that this was God's candidate as the future king. But God told Samuel not to be impressed by his appearance or his height. Man looks at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart.⁸

So Jesse paraded his other sons before Samuel, but none was considered worthy by God to be the next king. Samuel, bewildered, asked Jesse whether he had any more sons. Jesse had one more, his youngest son, but David, who was away looking after some sheep was not considered by his father as a likely candidate to become the future king of Israel. Jesse, as his father, would have known his son, yet, even so, how wrong he was. Even a father does not see what God sees. When David was brought in, Samuel anointed him to be the next king in place of Saul.

Lesson learnt

From the human point of view, we too might have thought that Eliab, the eldest, was the right choice for next king. And, like Jesse, we might not have considered David as a worthy candidate. But God saw things in David that were not so obvious. He liked what He saw, and He chose David to be the next king. David had his faults, but God looked on his heart, and He saw the heart of a man who would lead His people rightly. Even as a young man David showed that he had the heart of a king.

As biblical history has shown, David turned out to be the greatest king the Israelites ever had. As God said of him later, he was 'a man after my own heart'.⁹

So don't be too quick to judge people and situations. Ask first are we seeing what God sees? □

¹ Matthew 23:5-6

² Matthew 23:27-28

³ 1 Chronicles 28:9

⁴ Isaiah 55:5-9

⁵ Matthew 23:23

⁶ Matthew 24:25-26

⁷ 1 Samuel 16:1

⁸ 1 Samuel 16:7

⁹ Acts 13:22;
1 Samuel 16:1, 7

Movie of life

“All the world’s a stage,” said Shakespeare in *As You Like It*, “and all the men and women [are] merely players: They have their exits and their entrances.”

If Shakespeare had been a screenwriter instead of a playwright, he might well have said that all the world is a movie, and we all come into the movie at some point and exit at another. In one of Shakespeare’s more cynical moments, he has Macbeth say that life is only a shadow on the stage, a “tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

Is the movie of life really pointless? The gospel says it is not—there is in fact a grand purpose—and a triumphant conclusion.

A movie of our own

Jesus is the great Screenwriter and Director of the movie of our lives. He created not only our roles, but us as well, and He shapes the screenplay of our lives into the grand epic He wants it to be. As the Master Storyteller, Jesus weaves us into the adventure of life eternal, the life of the never-ending age to come.

It is in Jesus that our lives have their true meaning. His resurrection is proof that He loves us. It is proof that He lives for us, intercedes for us and transforms us. In Him our lives find their true meaning and purpose.

So much of life is out of our control. Things happen, and most of the time, we have little or no say. The unexpected and the

unplanned for happen, and such events may be good or bad. We might plan for and work toward a goal, but because of circumstances beyond our control, that goal may never be realized.

We can’t control the stage, the scenes, or the other actors. But we can make decisions about how we will respond to the events that happen to us.

Many people respond to life with anger, resentment and impatience,

by
Joseph Tkach

and upset, always worried that they might not get what they want or keep what they have.

Life doesn’t have to be that way. If our trust is in the Director, we can let love and patience guide our responses to the events and circumstances of our daily lives. We can rest our spirits in the One who works all things together for our good. When things don’t go our way, we’re free in Christ not to stress out. We’re free to return good for evil.

We don’t have to be afraid, because we cast all our cares on the One who loves us.

The never-ending sequel

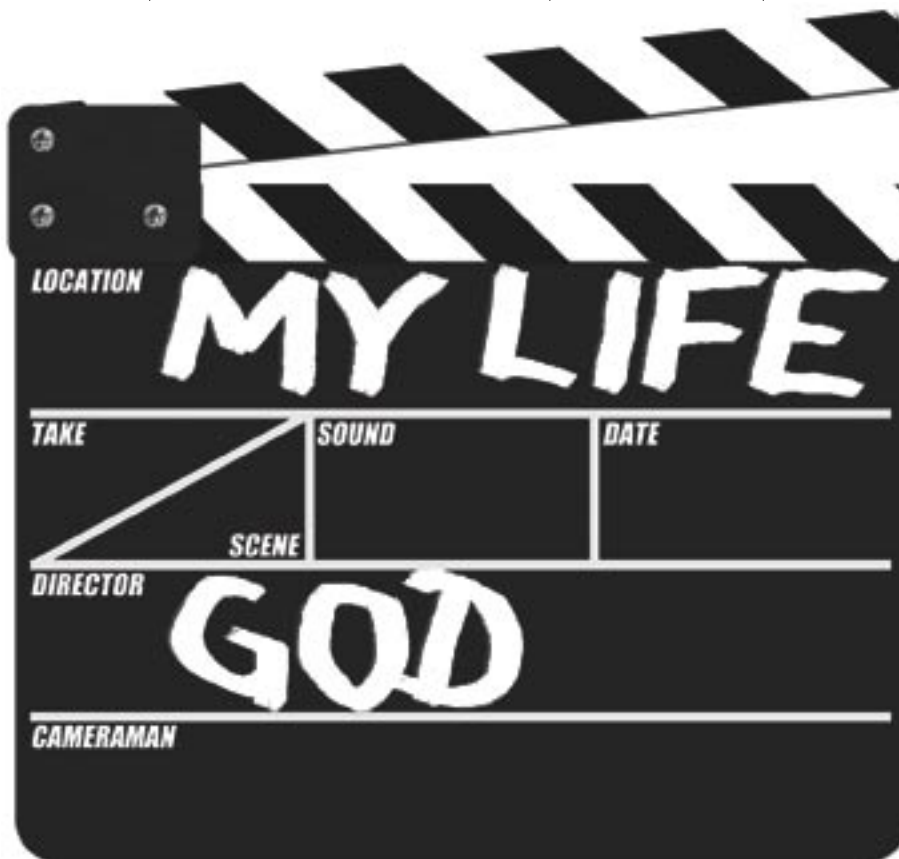
We will all exit the story of life, leaving tasks undone, projects unfinished, stories incomplete. But on the other side of the silver screen is another story, a story into which Jesus Christ has written a part for us. In that story, loose ends are tied up, grief and tragedy are turned to joy, and wounds and betrayals are healed. It is a story of happy endings always getting better.

It is God’s great pleasure to make us part of that never-ending story. Even now, in Christ we are learning to live

the kind of life appropriate for such eternal joy. We are learning to love others just as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us.

May we all have faith to look beyond the distress of the present moment and keep our hearts set on the triumphant finale, the finale that goes on forever.

That’s something worth thinking about. □



even bitterness. Instead of facing life with a tranquil spirit and making wise decisions about how to deal with whatever situations arise; they see everything in terms of whether or not it interferes with the pursuit of their own idea of happiness and pleasure.

When something gets in their way, they get angry and try to force their selfish will on others. They go through life stressed out, fearful

From religion t

Most Asians are religious as evidenced by the number of places of worship and worship attendance. They have a fear of God and want to do what is right and pleasing to Him. They want God's blessings and favours. And that's good because we all want His blessings, don't we?

But the problem is that the vast majority of people are still unhappy in spite of their sincere efforts to please their gods. Somehow God doesn't seem so real to them. He doesn't seem to exert any significant influence in their lives, let alone experience His goodness. There is a feeling of emptiness in their lives and they don't quite know how to fill it.

Is there something fundamentally wrong with religion, or in the way we worship God? Is religion transforming our lives? Is it helping us to know God better or make our lives happier? Or is it falling short?

These are important questions which need answers. Otherwise all our religious efforts might come to naught, and we may even end up worshipping God in vain. Jesus Christ chided the Pharisees and the teachers of the law for burdening their disciples with too many traditions and ritualistic laws, but more for failing to teach them how to build relationship with God. They had substituted religion for relationship.¹ Could we be falling into the same trap?

What religions teach

All religions teach good things—such as telling people not to steal, kill, or commit adultery. They also tell us to be kind, considerate, and be caring. All of this is good and we must certainly pursue them.

But religions also burden their followers with all kinds of rules and traditions—doing things in a certain way, using 'holy' objects, chanting mantras, studying the movement of planets, or believing certain numbers, days and seasons to be more sacred than others. All these divert peoples' minds and place stumbling blocks toward true



by
**Dr. P.
Sellappan**

worship which should focus on building a relationship with God.

Religions also tell worshippers to perform their religious duties diligently so they might qualify for the next world. They prescribe rules, rituals and works of charity. All these demands keep people busy. The worshippers are expected to perform their religious duties faithfully and, if they don't, they are warned that they might not make it to the next life. This sets their followers on a guilt trip which makes them worry about their spiritual standing with God.

Although religion emphasises good behaviour, such good behaviour doesn't necessarily help us to know God or build that intimate personal relationship with Him. Instead, it wastes time and energy on meaningless rituals which only take us further away from knowing God or developing a personal relationship with Him. That's a devastating tragedy for a religion.

Called to build relationships

God has not called us just to perform rituals or follow a set of dos and don'ts. He is more interested for us to get to know Him and enter into a personal relationship with Him. He wants us to develop His mindset and character. He wants us to become His children and live with Him forever. That's why He created us.

True Christianity is not really a religion. It's about knowing God and building a personal relationship with Him. It's also about building a loving relationship with our fellowman.

When God created our first parents Adam and Eve He revealed to them who He was and who they were. Satan then put doubts into their minds. He lured them to mistrust and disobey God and, after they rejected Him and sinned, God allowed them to form their own religions and forms of worship.²

To fulfil His plan, God then chose

one particular nation—the nation of Israel—and gave them His moral code, the 10 commandments.

Although Israel as a nation was disobedient, God nevertheless was determined to deal with them since through them He would raise up the Messiah/Saviour who would ultimately deliver the entire world from the penalty of sin which is death³. So, despite their continued rebellions, He worked with them patiently.

Because of Israel's inability to obey, and to point to them a need for a Saviour who could, God included rituals which they could obey.⁴ The religious leaders of that time, however, added many more of their own laws, presumably aimed at keeping the people from sinning.

Man-made traditions and rituals cannot save people. That's why God sent His son Jesus Christ to save us. He came and died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and reconcile us to God. He did away with the need to keep the many laws and rituals. What laws we keep now are kept as a consequence of having salvation, not to receive salvation. The laws and rituals the Ancient Israelites were asked to keep, and those they imposed on themselves, didn't help them build an intimate relationship with God. Neither will our laws and rituals. Only Christ can. He is our only passport to true happiness and salvation.

God is calling us to build a personal relationship with Him through His Son Jesus Christ. He is calling us to develop His holy character and become His children. He is calling us to an eternally happy and exciting life with Him. That's our potential and destiny. There is no other better offer anywhere.

Christianity is about knowing God and building a personal relationship with Him and our fellowman. Jesus Christ gave two great commandments which encapsulate all these love-

o relationship

relationships: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind”⁵ and “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”⁶. This is the basis of all relationships.

Building relationships

Right now your relationship with God and people (spouse, children, neighbours, office mates) may not be all that good. That’s okay; it is the starting point. You are not alone in this relationship struggle. Millions of people also experience similar struggle.

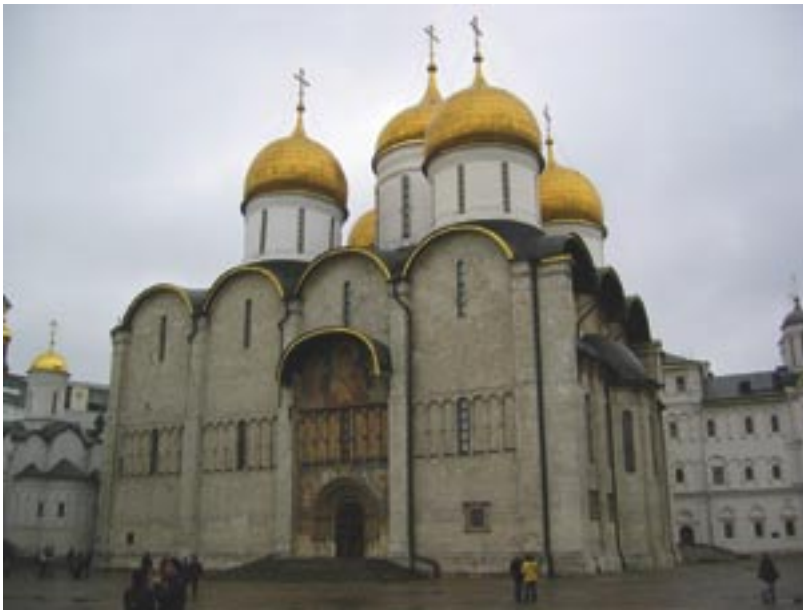
So how do you go about building relationships with God and fellow man? Here are some pointers.

A good place to start is to acknowledge that God is sovereign and that He owns all things including your life. We need to acknowledge that He is the source of all blessings, wisdom, knowledge and understanding.

You also need to admit that you don’t know God and that you want sincerely to seek Him. If you examine your life carefully, you will also have to admit that you have sinned (disobeyed God) and that you need His mercy and forgiveness.⁷ That’s where Christ enters. He came from heaven to forgive your sin. He died on the cross on your behalf so that you don’t have to die (the second death). You don’t have to do anything to receive His pardon except to believe that He has paid it for you. It’s called grace—something for which you don’t have to pay or do anything. No

matter how big or ugly your sins, His sacrifice is all that you need to cover your sins. This is because, as the Creator of all mankind, His life is worth more than all lives put together. That’s why Christ’s sacrifice can cover all the sins of humanity.

Once you repent and accept Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, God promises to place in you His very own divine nature (in the person of the Holy Spirit) that will enable you to begin to think and act like Him.



You get to know God by studying and meditating on His word (the Bible), praying to Him, and doing His will. His will for you is that you love Him and your fellowman. As your relationship with God and fellow man matures, you will begin to produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit which is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, gentleness, patience and faithfulness⁸.

You build relationship with people by loving them. Love involves caring, sharing, forgiving and showing kindness and patience. It rejoices with those who rejoice and weeps with those who weep. It is not boastful or arrogant. It wishes the best for people. This kind of love comes only from God

through the Holy Spirit. You need to ask Him for this gift.

One way to overcome envy, bitterness and the like is to regard others as your fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and sons and daughters. We don’t envy when someone in our family is successful or blessed. Instead, we celebrate. We weep when a family member is hurting or going through some trial.

Building relationship is a process and a journey. As you travel this journey, you will think and become more and more like Jesus Christ. It may not always be a comfortable journey, but certainly a challenging and a fulfilling one. He will complete the salvation process at His second coming when He will raise you to immortal life. Sin will have lost its power over you, and you will not have to struggle with your flesh anymore. You will be completely delivered so that you can enjoy your new life in Christ. But you don’t have to wait to enjoy that new life; you can begin the process right now.

Start now

It’s time that we move from religion to relationship. Life doesn’t consist of performing a set of often-meaningless rituals. Rituals don’t solve human problems. They only enslave us and make us unhappy. They don’t resolve conflicts at home, school, workplace, or between neighbours or nations. They sweep human problems under the carpet and put up a façade. They don’t help us to transform or make us happy.

Instead, let’s start building relationships with our family, friends and neighbours, and most importantly with God. God loves us and cares for us no matter in what situation we are currently in. He wants to bless us and give us eternal life. He wants to adopt us as His children and wants to share His riches with us. That’s what Christianity is all about—building loving relationships with God and fellowman. □

¹ Matthew 15:8–9

² 2 Kings 16:3–4, Psalm 106:36–39

³ Romans 3:23

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:18

⁵ Matthew 22:37

⁶ Matthew 23:25–26

⁷ 1 John 1:8–9

⁸ Galatians 5:22

A love t

Air Florida flight 90 had just taken off from Washington, D. C.'s National Airport when disaster struck.

Within seconds the plane and its 79 passengers plunged into the icy Potomac River.

When a National Park Service Police helicopter arrived, only six passengers were alive, hanging on to the tail section.

Donald Usher, pilot of the helicopter, risked flying as close as he could to let down a lifeline. One heroic passenger repeatedly passed that lifeline to the others. By the time the other five had been rescued, he had disappeared beneath the icy waters.

“He was a brave and a good man.” The helicopter pilot was reported as saying, “Imagine! He had just survived that horrible plane crash. The river was ice-cold and each minute brought him closer to death. He could have gone on the first trip but he put everyone else ahead of himself.”

It's been more than two decades since that fateful day, January 13, 1982. Many other disasters and daring rescues have happened since. But the heroism of that day still stands out—the heroism of the rescuers, and especially of that sixth passenger who gave his chance for life to others.

What an incredible example of selfless sacrifice! It makes you ask, “What would I have done?”

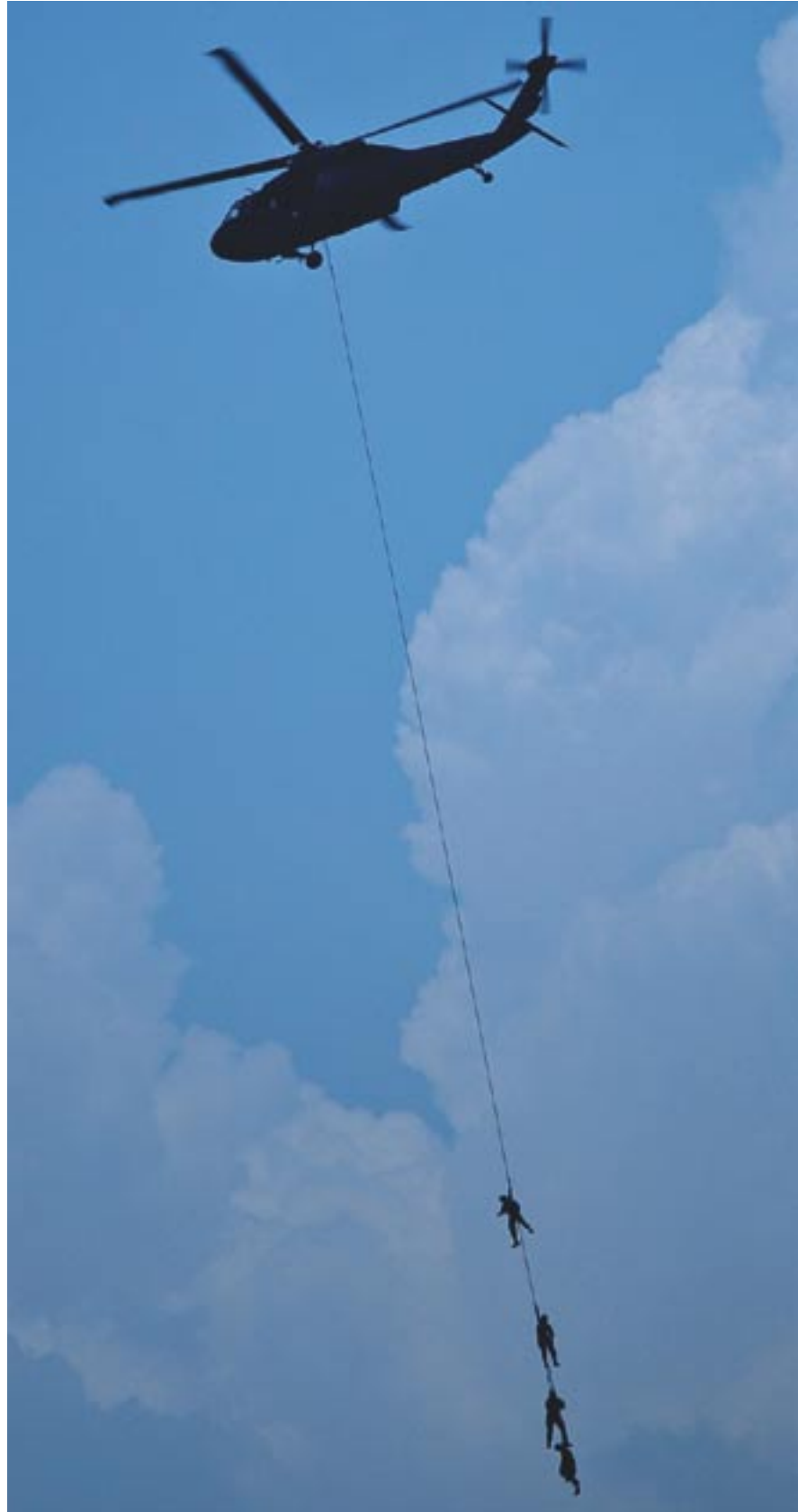
The greatest Hero

Thinking about this man's unselfish example can help us better understand another Hero who made it possible for billions to live. This Hero faced even greater challenges.

Often Heroes act on impulse. They don't really think about the fact that they might die. This doesn't take anything away from their bravery. Fear has kept many from doing anything at all.

But there was one Hero who knew in advance that His life would be needed to save others. Even knowing the painful death in store for Him,

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o die for

He volunteered; without Him we would all be doomed.

He didn't give His life just to save friends—or even innocent bystanders. He was willing to die to save even those who hate Him—His enemies.

Of course, this Hero whose death made possible the rescue of billions of lives is Jesus Christ. It's good to consider more deeply the selfless love that He showed for each of us.

Though He had long known that He would have to die, those last few hours were painful ones for Jesus Christ.

He had trudged up and down the roadways of the Holy Land teaching, helping and healing. He had patiently worked with His disciples, and He cared for them deeply. But now one of His friends was about to betray Him.

The shadow of death

It was the night before Christ's death, and His disciples were all eating with Him. When Judas Iscariot got up from the table, Jesus knew that Judas was on his way to sell Him into the hands of His jealous enemies. Though He knew it would happen, it must have cut Jesus to the heart. "What you are about to do, do quickly," Jesus told him.

Judas made his way to the religious leaders who were jealous of Christ's influence over the people. They were willing to pay Judas to lead them to Christ when the crowds were not around.

Meanwhile Jesus and His disciples left the house and headed for one of their favourite places, a garden which Judas also knew about. The mood was somber.

Instead of expecting His disciples to comfort Him, Jesus Christ focused on serving and comforting them: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you... Do not be afraid".¹

When He did think about the terrible torture and death ahead of Him, He prayed fervently for His Father's help.

Three times He went to pray.



"And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."²

Soon it was time. Judas came with a group of soldiers to arrest Jesus on a bogus charge. Christ's unselfish thought was for the safety of His followers: "If you are looking for me, then let these men go".³

His followers all fled. Jesus Christ faced His trial, beatings and humiliating treatment alone. Then soldiers stretched Him out on a cross, and pounded crude iron nails through His hands and feet. He hung in agony while many people came to insult Him.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, could quickly have put those blasphemous people out of their misery. Instead He put up with it all, to the death, for a great purpose.

Your penalty has been paid

Why did Christ have to die? He died so that you and I can live forever. The Bible says sin is breaking God's law.⁴ The law of God is fulfilled by love—a life of caring and giving, a life marked by selflessness rather than selfishness.⁵ The wages of breaking God's law is death.⁶

All have sinned⁷ and sin sets up a barrier between the sinner and God⁸.

Jesus Christ took on Himself that death sentence. He also took on Himself, through His scourging and the suffering of crucifixion, the awful and tragic consequences that our sins cause. Jesus took the whole burden of sin so that when we repent we are completely forgiven.

Christ never sinned. He never brought the death penalty on Himself. As Creator of humanity, His life was greater than the sum

total of all other lives.⁹

So when He died on the cross, He paid the death penalty in place of us—if we repent and live by faith.

We prove our belief in Christ and our acceptance of His sacrifice by turning from the old way we have lived and setting ourselves to live God's way from now on.

No greater love

Remembering Christ's crucifixion is sobering, but it can also remind us to show profound thanks for our Hero's love.

As the Bible reminds us: "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends"¹⁰.

Jesus Christ willingly gave His life to enable us to be forgiven and rescued from eternal death. There is no greater love than that. □

¹ John 14:27

² Luke 22:44

³ John 18:8

⁴ 1 John 3:4

⁵ Romans 13:10

⁶ Romans 6:23

⁷ Romans 6:23

⁸ Isaiah 59:2

⁹ John 1:3

¹⁰ John 15:13

How to win w

How should a Christian pursue success in a world of cutthroat competition?

We all want success. We don't all see it the same way—what success is for me might not be success for you. But we all enjoy the sense of satisfaction which comes from achievement. It's an important part of life.

Success brings appreciation and approval from others. That's important, too. What's even more important is that the right kind of success also brings appreciation and approval from God. Nothing can be more important than that.

That is why the Bible has many stern warnings about the deceitfulness of the wrong kind of success. So how can you be sure your success—however you choose to pursue it—will also mean you are a success in God's sight?

Is winning everything?

To compete, to defeat opponents and to outwit rivals are considered essential survival skills for those who seek success in this dog-eat-dog world. Role models for success are fast-talking, hard-driving, ruthlessly decisive business executives. They are viewed as *winners*, and many want to know how they do it. What are their winning tactics? How do they organise their time? How do they develop strategies and clinch deals?

Just this morning I received an invitation to examine a programme that would reveal the secrets of successful executives' 'power techniques', including those of a bank president who instructed his staff: "I want my people to destroy our competitors. I want to kill and crush them." Well, maybe that's life in the real world. But it certainly isn't a Christian way of life, and it is no way to have God's stamp of approval on your success. "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" warned Jesus in Mark 8:36.

Jesus Christ never taught His followers to be ruthless or relentless.



by
John Halford

He emphasised instead the importance of sharing, helping, serving, being your brother's keeper and loving your neighbour as yourself.

So, is success in the competitive world off limits for a Christian? Would it be wiser to play it safe and withdraw from the race, preferring a poverty-level life on the sidelines while we wait for a better world?

No, that is not what Jesus Christ said to do. He made it clear that His followers, as individuals and as a body, were to be productive and useful members of society. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" was His instruction.¹

Win, lose or withdraw?

The gospel has the power to change people's lives, and people who believe the gospel should show that change. A follower of Christ should be a positive influence, setting an example, as Jesus Himself did. A Christian should not 'drop out'.

The Bible strongly emphasises the importance of supporting yourself and your family. In the early years of the church, when some people stopped participating in their society because they thought Jesus would soon return, the apostle Paul reminded them: "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat".² Of course, this principle does not apply to those who find themselves unavoidably unemployed. It applies only to those who are not *willing* to work and support themselves. Any one of us can temporarily lose a job, and need support and encouragement.

The Bible also endorses education, diligence and the value of making sound investments. It does not prevent those who work hard from enjoying the fruits of their labour. Jesus counted several wealthy people among His friends and supporters. Zacchaeus was rich³, as was Joseph of Arimathea⁴.

Do we stand a better chance of pleasing God if we become rich, ambitious and upwardly mobile? Are poor Christians in humble circumstances letting God down? Not at all. The apostle Paul reassured even slaves—surely the least upwardly mobile of all occupations—that they could live in a way that had God's approval.



Jesus called people from many backgrounds—household servants, merchants, fishermen, tax collectors, scholars, common soldiers and senior military officers. He would have accepted a rich young ruler if the man had not been so tied to his material possessions.⁵

It is no different today. People from every race, ethnic group and economic background make up

without losing

God's church. All can equally be successful in God's sight. It isn't who you are or what you have that determines how successful you are in God's sight. It is what you let *God* do with what He has given you that decides whether or not you are a success.



Talents and pounds

We can understand this if we look at two of Jesus' parables, which at first seem to tell the same story. But there are subtle differences, and each adds to our understanding of what Jesus Christ expects of us.

Let's look first at the parable of the pounds, found in Luke 19: 11–27. Jesus told this parable while travelling to Jerusalem in the days just before the final events of His

ministry. He realised His disciples would not understand what was about to happen. They were looking to Jesus to restore their nation's fortunes by overthrowing the Roman government and establishing the prophesied messianic age.

But Jesus knew that many centuries would pass before He would set up His kingdom on earth. Instead of leading a popular revolt, Jesus was about to be arrested, tried and crucified (verse 11). The parable of the pounds was given to help His disciples, and all of us, understand how we should live as we look forward to Christ's return.

In the parable, Jesus likened himself to a nobleman who went on a journey, leaving His affairs in the hands of His servants. Each servant received 10 pounds (or *minas*), about three months' wages, with instructions to put the money to work through business, investment or trading (verses 13, 15). Notice that these servants were not asked to trade with resources they had earned or deserved. They were entrusted with their *master's* resources. All they had for trading was what He had given them.

When the nobleman returned, He called the servants to account. One servant had done exceptionally well, increasing His mina tenfold. "Well done, good servant," said the nobleman. "Because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities" (verse 17). The reward was generous, but the master knew what He was doing. The servant was honest and diligent. He had shown by the way he handled a relatively small amount that he could be trusted with much, much more.

The second servant had also done well. He had increased his master's investment fivefold. It was a solid, responsible effort. "You also be over five cities," said the nobleman (verse 19).

A third servant, however, came forward and gave the original sum

back, saying: "Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief" (verse 20). This servant had done nothing. He hadn't traded or invested the money. Realising his master would not be pleased, he blamed his master. "I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow" (verse 21).

The nobleman's reaction is surprising. He did not say, "So you decided to play it safe. Well, at least you didn't lose it." Instead, He is angry and disappointed, since He had expected at least *some* return on His investment (verse 22). "Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?" He demanded (verse 23). This servant's responsibility was taken from him, and given to the one who had the tenfold increase.

What is the point Jesus was making in this story? It is that God expects us to produce something with what He has given us. Remember, the emphasis is on the *gifts* He has given us. When God calls us, He entrusts us with knowledge of great value. Paul, speaking of those God calls, said: "To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory"⁶.

"Christ in you, the hope of glory" includes the understanding of repentance and forgiveness of sin, the good news of the gospel of the kingdom, and the gifts of salvation and the Holy Spirit. The Bible speaks of "true riches"⁷ and the "pearl of great price"⁸. It is a gift that Jesus' disciples are not to keep to themselves, like secret treasure (or buried talents). They should take this good news to the world.⁹

How do you do business with these gifts? Are they 'negotiable'? In a sense, yes. These gifts give us power—to change, to live in hope even when things go wrong, to be a positive influence, to serve and to do good. The results of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering,

gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance—have a great potential for good when put to use.

Jesus expects His gifts to change our lives, and these changes should be evident for all to see. “A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden,” he said. “Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house”.¹⁰

But the parable in Luke 19 can be misused to give an apparent green light to those who are naturally success oriented. They might think that the parable means “Go for the good life. Get as much as you can. You’ll reap the reward now *and* for all eternity. Better use those power techniques.” No, that isn’t the intent of the parable. We can further understand why when we look at a similar, but not quite the same, parable in Matthew 25.

The true riches

In this parable, the traveller entrusts a much larger sum to his servants. “To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one” (verse 15). The talents (Greek *talanton*) are not used here in our modern sense of implying a skill or ability. In Jesus’ day, a talent was a unit of exchange of considerable value, perhaps as much as a quarter of a million dollars.

The master in the parable gave each of his servants a different number of talents. He knew they were different in background, education and natural ability. He knew that such differences would not limit the percentage of increase that his servants could attain.

The man with five talents traded wisely and made a 100 per cent return on the investment (verse 16). So did the servant with only two talents (verse 17). He produced two more talents—also a 100 per cent return. He used his opportunity just as effectively as his colleague.

The servant with only one talent could have followed the example of the others. If he had produced only

one more talent, he still would have had a 100 per cent increase. But he didn’t. He played it safe, or so he thought, by burying his talent in the ground (verse 18). He thought only of himself. He did not reach out. He did not take advantage of opportunities. He served no one and reaped no benefit from his master’s investment.

When the master returned, he praised the servant who had made five talents: “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (verse 21). He said almost the same words to the servant whose increase was two talents. The master rewarded the degree of effort, not the amount of increase.

But, as in the other parable, the servant who returned only the original investment received condemnation. “You wicked and lazy servant... You ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest” (verses 26–27). As in the other parable, this servant was full of excuses. “I was afraid. I’m not as talented as others. I decided to play it safe, and just give you back what you gave me.” His lack of activity was no excuse. He could at least have put the money in the bank, making what he had available to those who knew how to use it.

Even those who feel they do not have much to offer can support others in their efforts. Not everyone is able to be the leader, but everyone can do something to help. Almost anything is better than following the example of the servant who buried the talent and then sat idly waiting for the master’s return. That was not what he had been given the talent for!

Jesus expects each of us, whoever we are, whatever our station in life, no matter what age, to use what He has given us.

He is not impressed with great ability, nor daunted by lack of it. He expects us to make the most of our circumstances to serve, help and be a light to this world. Acts of kindness, unselfishness, generosity, thoughtfulness and compassion do not go unnoticed. “Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (verse 40).

There is no reason why Christians shouldn’t become prosperous and influential, provided that fame and fortune remain in the right perspective in our lives. Paul reminds those who become rich, “not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share”.¹¹

Jesus turned the conventional perks and privileges of success upside down. He said to His disciples, “He who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves”.¹² The way to eternal life is ultimately open to everyone because Jesus Christ, unquestionably the greatest among us, was willing to use His resources—His power, His glory, even His life—so we could share what He has for eternity.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich”.¹³ We, too, can let Christ work in us to enrich others. We should strive to make the most of the precious gifts He has entrusted to our care. That is a sure formula for success. It is not a guarantee of abundant fame and fortune, though that may come too. But you can be certain of a far more satisfying success—the kind that comes from living a life pleasing to God. Make that success your goal and one day you, too, will hear your Master say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” □

¹ Matthew 5:16

² 2 Thessalonians 3:10

³ Luke 19:2

⁴ Matthew 27:57

⁵ Matthew 19:16–22

⁶ Colossians 1:27

⁷ Luke 16:11

⁸ Matthew 13:46

⁹ Matthew 28:19–20

¹⁰ Matthew 5:14–15

¹¹ 1 Timothy 6:17–18

¹² Luke 22:26

¹³ 2 Corinthians 8:9

Weakness becomes strength

Sometimes your biggest weakness can become your greatest strength. Take, for example, the story of a 10-year-old boy who decided to study judo despite the fact that he had lost his left arm in a devastating car accident.

The boy began lessons with an old Japanese judo master or sensei. He was doing well, so he couldn't understand why, after three months of training the master had taught him only one move.

"Sensei," he finally asked, "shouldn't I be learning more moves?"

"This is the only move you know, but this is the only move you'll ever need to know," the sensei replied.

Not quite understanding, but believing in his teacher, the boy kept training.

Several months later, the sensei took his student to his first tournament. Surprising himself, the boy won his first two matches easily. The third match proved to be more difficult, but after some time, his opponent became impatient and charged; the boy deftly used his one move to win the match. Still amazed by his success, he was now in the finals.

This time, his opponent was bigger, stronger, and more experienced. For a while, the boy appeared to be overmatched. Concerned that the handicapped boy might get hurt, the referee called a time-out. He was about to stop the match when the sensei intervened.

"No," the sensei insisted, "Let him continue."

Soon after the match resumed, his opponent made a critical mistake: he dropped his guard. Instantly, the boy used his move to pin him. He had won the match and the tournament. He was the champion.

On the way home, the boy and



by
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sensei reviewed every move in each and every match. Then he summoned the courage to ask what was really on his mind.

"Sensei, how did I win the tournament with only one move?"

"You won for two reasons," the sensei answered. "First, you've almost mastered one of the most difficult throws in all of judo. And second, the only known defence for that move is for your opponent to grab your left arm."



to grow and improve upon.¹

2. Find ways to change your weaknesses into strengths: Most of us have a tendency to use our weaknesses as excuses to avoid doing things. On the contrary, like the little boy who undertook to learn judo in spite of having one arm, an almost impossible feat for most of us, we need be unafraid to put ourselves in positions where our weaknesses can be put to the test.

For example, if you are an impatient

person, learn to play chess.

3. Look for a good teacher:

Like the little boy, we need to seek a master and teacher to help us to learn to overcome.

The ideal master and teacher would be God and Jesus Christ. God will often allow us to be put in positions where our weaknesses will be tested, but He promises to help us through them².

4. Have faith in your teacher: Once you accept your teacher, have faith that what He does is best for you, even if you do not understand³ for God is faithful⁴. There are often times when we get frustrated by what we go through but God knows what He is doing and will ultimately do what is best for us.⁵

5. Train persistently: We need to continue training to succeed.⁶ Nothing lasting comes overnight. Anything of value takes time to achieve.

6. Never give up: You will eventually receive your reward.

We usually don't have the patience or endurance to wait for something that takes long to achieve but we need to persist.⁷

7. Talk to God regularly: Discuss with Him your progress, your frustrations and your joys. He is interested in your success and you will be surprised at how and when you will receive encouragement.

Remember nothing is impossible with God. More often than not our weaknesses can be made into stepping-stones to success. □

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:28, Galatians 6:4

² 1 Corinthians 10:13

³ Mark 11:22

⁴ Hebrews 10:23, 1 Corinthians 1:9

⁵ Romans 8:28

⁶ Luke 6:40

⁷ Matthew 10:22

The boy's biggest weakness had become his biggest strength.

This story suggests several points to consider in making our weaknesses into strengths.

1. Assess and acknowledge your weaknesses: To begin with we need to assess and acknowledge our weaknesses by examining ourselves regularly. We should look upon our weaknesses as growth areas. From this positive viewpoint we will be more comfortable in looking for areas

Our need

Take a walk around town. What do you see? Multitudes of human beings going about deeply engrossed in their daily tasks or routines. They are often extremely busy with hardly a moment to spare. These are the 'ordinary' people, the ones who really need to work hard to earn a living, to provide for their families, to pay the never-ending bills, to settle their mortgages and car loans. These are the people whose lives are bound by the realities of life. They live in a merciless dog-eat-dog world that takes its toll on everyone. There are also quite a few people who have all the necessities of life—ample food, a beautiful house, a car or a well paying job. They are very comfortable in their routine lifestyles and seem to enjoy what life has to offer.

Can a great God be of any significance to such ordinary people? Is God someone who only belongs to religious people? There are, of course, some who dress, look and talk in a way that presents them as distinctively 'holy' and as such consider themselves different from others. But can ordinary people know God? More importantly, do ordinary people *need* God? When people have everything they require, is there anything more or better in life that can bring joy, happiness, peace and contentment on a permanent basis? Yes there is.

Knowing God

The Bible presents a special message from God to the inhabitants of the earth from all walks of life. He says "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches. But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and *knows* me, that I am the Lord, exercising loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight."¹ Here is God's wish or will for mankind. He wants all people to know Him. But then reality tells us that not all people do know God. Why? The reason for this is the

presence of sin in human beings. We have all have and so fall short of the glory of God."² By our sins we ourselves have put up a barrier to knowing Him. Even so, many have sought to know who God is. This unquenchable curiosity has led some to interpret God as one person, while others consider Him as many. Some seek Him through various idols and others have developed complicated philosophies to try to understand Him.

The truth is we cannot understand or interpret the Creator using our limited physical senses. It is God Himself who reveals who He is. Therefore the only way to know Him is through revealed knowledge. And that revealed knowledge is readily available.

Who is God?

The Bible tells us that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made."³ It is further revealed that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."⁴ This 'Word' is none other than Jesus Christ. Why did the Word need to dwell among us as Jesus Christ? The reason is because sin had entered the world and through sin so had death. Which human being could ever be capable of overcoming death? None.

Therefore mankind alone has no power whatsoever of lifting the penalty of sin, that is, death. We need God Himself to do that for us. Indeed God has done just that for mankind. The reason for this is astounding! "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."⁵ Jesus Christ gave His life on the cross



by
**Devaraj
Ramoo**

for mankind. He is the only one who can lift the penalty of sin that hangs over every human being. As such, Christ is for all humanity regardless of their beliefs. He is neither a religious concept nor just a Christian belief. He is the Messiah or Saviour of all mankind. Therefore, there is no human being who can say that he does not need God, for God is paramount for our eternal existence.

We need Christ to exist

Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified for our sins. He paid the price for us. No matter how good we are, we just cannot permanently lift the penalty of death from ending our existence. But with Christ paying the price for us, eternal existence is now available beyond our earthly lives. There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.⁶

I am often reminded of an incident which happened many years ago when I was just 20 years old. I desperately wanted to get an international passport as I had an opportunity to travel overseas. At the immigration department the officer refused to give me the passport because I was not legally an adult. I was already employed and very independent but no matter what I said the officer would not budge from his decision unless... my father would sign a document to grant his permission. I had no choice but to bring my father along and only after he had given his permission in writing did I get my passport.

Unless Christ 'signs' for us, we cannot obtain eternal life on our own accord. This is the will of Him who sent me (Christ) that everyone who sees the son and believes in Him may have everlasting life.⁷

We need a relationship with God

Whether we admit it or not, our primary need, our requirement for a fulfilled life, is a longing

for God

or yearning for God. All our dissatisfaction and emptiness in life, no matter how great our income, or how rewarding our jobs, can be traced back to an all encompassing need to relate to God.

A beautiful psalm states "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for the living God."⁸ This need for God is fulfilled through the dual roles of prayer and study of His word, the Bible. So many of us have little or no time for prayer. We can spend hours watching television but spending five minutes in prayer is a monumental task. The fact remains that every person needs to spend more time connecting with God through prayer. Our longing for God whether conscious or not receives fulfillment through fervent believing prayer. The 'ordinary' individual needs to make prayer a priority.

We need to eradicate the 'if I have time...' syndrome.

We all need God

The most accomplished and confident people on earth are not the wealthy or the intelligent. No, they are the ones who have a close relationship with God through prayer. Daniel was such a man. King Darius had just signed a decree that anyone who worshipped any God besides the King would be executed. Daniel's reaction was amazing. As soon as

he heard the news he went home and, in his upper room, knelt down on his knees three times that day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as was his custom since

when He was on Earth. He would often seek privacy to pray. In His hour of great distress He prayed so fervently that His sweat was as great drops of blood falling down to the ground.¹⁰ That was how much He needed God!

We need to bring God to others

When we realise that God is the One who has saved us and that we need to have a relationship with Him, there arises a third need. This is the need to proclaim Christ to others. We cannot bottle up God for ourselves. Our own need for God requires that others know Christ also. Christ instructed the apostles to go and make disciples of all the nations.¹¹ Today that message is still relevant. The sufferings of this world are heart wrenching to say the least. As I write, millions of people in many countries are starving and face extreme violence. A world that does not understand God's will for mankind is headed for destruction and misery. This magazine, THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA, was born out of an intense desire to bring God to others and promote peace and godliness wherever possible.

We feel extremely fulfilled when others benefit from the message and saving grace of Christ. There are even people who travel to remote and very dangerous places to preach Christ. Why would anyone do such a thing at the cost of personal harm? Perhaps it is a need for them that must be fulfilled. Such a need is the driving force behind the preaching of the gospel. Though we need food and water to survive, our greater need is a knowledge of and relationship with God. Such is the manner of our make up. Its time humanity realises this. Perhaps then we can begin the journey to lasting peace. May the grace of God help us to see our need for Him. □

early days.⁹ How many of us would do that with a death sentence hanging over our heads? For his faith God delivered Daniel from his dangerous situation even after he was sentenced to be thrown into the den of lions. For Daniel, his relationship with God was above all his earthly situations. Today we also need such a relationship with God as illustrated so remarkably by this man of God.

Christ Himself set the perfect example when He, being the very Word of God, still prayed fervently

¹ Jeremiah 9: 23–24

² Romans 3:23

³ John 1:1–3

⁴ John 1:14

⁵ John 3:16

⁶ Romans 8:1

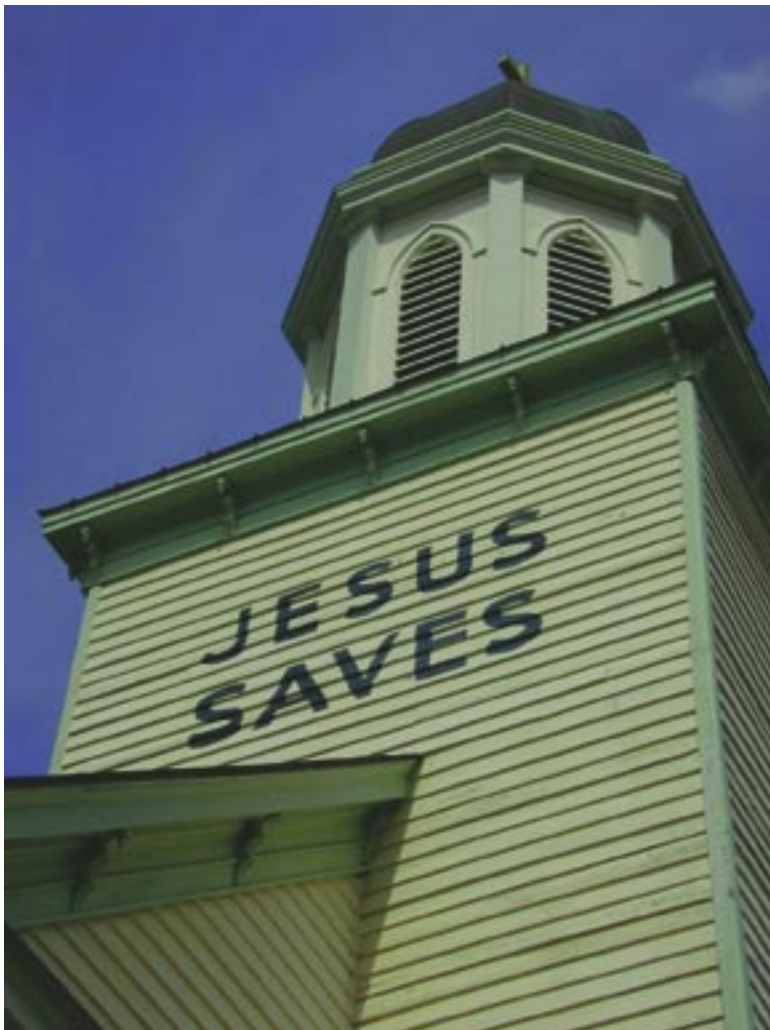
⁷ John 6:40

⁸ Psalm 42:1–2

⁹ Daniel 6:10

¹⁰ Luke 22:44

¹¹ Matthew 28:19



A pillar of cloud by day, a pillar of fire by night

Have you experienced days of sudden anxiety and frustration for no reason at all? Is it as if a cloud of darkness hovers above you signalling pending doom or problem? It is not uncommon to feel this way especially when everything seems to go wrong and your day fails to start right. It may happen when you receive some bad news from people you love or those close to you. These affect your day in such a way that if you don't get hold of yourself, your day would be ruined. What do you do when this happens?

we really want to do. Oftentimes, too, we slip again and again as we walk the Christian walk. The realisation that we have done so usually comes too late and we suffer the consequences.

In moments like this I recall Numbers 9:15–16 which says, “From evening till morning the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire. That is how it continued to be; the cloud covered it, and at night it looked like fire.”

These verses showed how God walked with the Israelites in the wilderness on their way to the

by
Eufrocinia R.
Manlulu

and stormy, but in the darkest moment of my life He covers me with His fire of protection and love and when the days dawn on me He is beside me and with me, rejoicing with me. What about you? Do you feel this way, too? Where is God during these moments in your life?

There are circumstances in our Christian lives which are beyond our control, but let us remember that these circumstances are ordained by God. If we have surrendered completely to Him, then every facet, every aspect and everything in our lives is in God's hands. In the life of a saint there is no such thing as chance. Everything is God-ordained. He allows us to be where we do not want to be and into circumstances we do not understand. But rest assured in the knowledge that God allows this in order to accomplish His purpose in us.

We must remember that the Lord holds us securely, and we can be restored to a close fellowship with Him when we ask forgiveness every time we sin¹. Yes, we are safe in Christ. We can have the confidence that He will keep us and bring us to our final destination just as He desired with the Israelites. Our salvation is secure and our future is safe because God is doing the holding. Each day of our lives begins with new mercy and new blessings from our merciful God. The marvellous light of His grace will lift the cloud of depression and replace it with hope of His intervention in our lives.

Let our God and Saviour Jesus Christ provide us with the pillar of cloud by day to shield us from the heat of pressures that come with the Christian life and allow God's Holy Spirit to provide us with His enabling power to sustain us in our Christian journey. Let God's pillar of fire light our path through the darkness of our trials giving us reason to rejoice in anticipating the completion of His mighty works in us. □



There could be any number of reasons Christians experience physical and emotional exhaustion which could turn into depression. The world we live in isn't exactly an ideal world. People are exposed to pressures and the stress of living and Christians are not exempt from them. It is doubly difficult for those of us who try to live by every word of God and finding it difficult to do so.

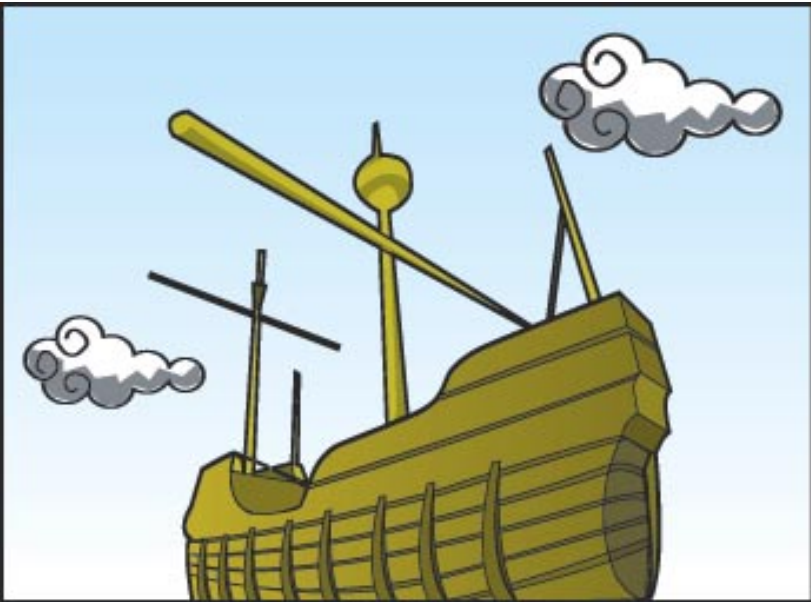
Trials could exhaust and depress us up to the point of quitting sometimes. We find ourselves surrounded by circumstances which force us to make decisions that are not to our liking or opposed to what

Promised Land. God provided a pillar of cloud during the day to shield them from the fiery rays of the sun in the desert while He gave them light through the pillar of fire by night—a light in the dark. This could be likened to a Christian's journey which is interspersed with light and dark, excitement and rejoicing with a quiet time in between.

I find comfort in these scriptures because I know that whatever circumstances I may be in, God is always before me with the Holy Spirit leading the way. The path may sometimes be treacherous

¹ 1 John 1:9

So, the next time you feel like God can't use you, just remember some of the Bible stories. For example,
 Noah got drunk;
 Abraham and Sarah were too old;
 Timothy was too young;
 Jacob lied;
 Leah wasn't the pretty one;
 Joseph was abused;
 Moses stuttered;
 Samson was a womaniser;
 Rahab was a prostitute;
 Naomi was a widow;
 David had an affair and was a murderer;
 Elijah was suicidal;
 Jonah ran from God;
 Peter denied Christ;
 and Mary was a teenager!



Everything I Need to Know about Life, I Learned from Noah's Ark

1. Don't miss the boat.
2. Remember that we are all in the same boat.
3. Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the boat.
4. Stay fit. When you're 600 years old, someone might ask you to do something really important.
5. Don't listen to the critics; just get on with the job that needs to be done.
6. Build your future on high ground.
7. For safety's sake, travel in pairs.
8. Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.
9. When you are stressed out, float a while.
10. Remember that the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.
11. No matter the storm, when you are with God, there is always a rainbow waiting.

Anonymous



Insufferable Roman Cruelty

The Romans sometimes compelled a captive to be joined face-to-face with a dead body, and to bear it about until the horrible effluvia destroyed the life of the living victim.

Virgil describes this cruel punishment:
 The living and the dead at his command
 Were coupled face to face, and hand to hand;
 Till choked with stench,
 in loathed embraces tied,
 The lingering wretches pined away and died.
 Without Christ, we are shackled to
 a dead corpse—our sinfulness.
 Only repentance frees us from certain death,
 for life and death cannot
 co-exist indefinitely.

Telling us to obey instinct is like telling us to obey 'people'.
 People say different things: so do instincts.
 Our instincts are at war...
 Each instinct, if you listen to it, will claim to be gratified at the expense of the rest.
 C. S. Lewis

As you know, meaningful relationships require boundaries. Sometimes this means letting the other person know you are offended even if they do not react the way you might wish.
 At times, keeping your boundaries may even mean terminating an unhealthy relationship.
 Written by a *Daily Encounter* reader in response to an article on being peacemakers

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.

Maintain a

What can you do to ensure a sound mind? What steps can you take to help prevent mental health problems?

As with physical health problems, so with mental health: “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

The best way to stop many mental and emotional problems is to take the necessary steps to see that they don’t start in the first place.

The following time-tested principles promote a strong, stable mind and healthy emotions. These seven principles are based on generations of experience and on sound biblical counsel.

Build strong family relationships

Most mental and emotional health problems begin in the home and are often caused by experiences in the family. Child abuse, alcoholism and the use of drugs often lead to traumatic and emotionally disturbing effects in the lives of children, subjecting them to pressures their young minds simply cannot handle. Even neglect and being unloved take their toll.

Strong and healthy minds, like strong and healthy bodies, are usually the product of happy, loving family relationships—parents who loved and cared for their children during the all-important formative years.

Today, we see an alarming rise in child abuse of all kinds. Our modern cultures, especially in the Western world, are producing a generation of children whose minds are subjected to abuse, damage and disease on an unprecedented scale. Is it any wonder we are seeing so many mental health problems?

The right family relations based on deep love and concern for children are essential to good mental health. Later in life, support and encouragement continue to be essential.

It is in the family that we find the help and support we need to bear up under life’s trials and tests, but

the principle certainly applies to friends as well.

We need friendships and companionship in life to prevent burdens from coming on us alone.

King Solomon recognised this important principle when he wrote in Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.”

To help prevent mental health problems we must strive to cultivate strong family relations and friendships as a source of encouragement and stability.

To this end we constantly need to be using and improving our human relations skills. We need to talk to one another—to share life’s joys and disappointments, our experiences with others, and to get their response and input.

One of the chief benefits of close contact with others is the feedback we receive from them. Because loners don’t get this critically important feedback, many live in their own little world, which may be very much out of touch with the real world.

The corrective nature of feedback about our notions and ideas puts us in touch with a greater and more accurate appraisal of reality than we could have by ourselves.

Strong family relations and good friendships not only prevent mental and emotional problems; they actually build and strengthen our minds, especially in times of stress.

Lead a well-ordered, stable life

We live in times of constant and stressful change. In the United States it is not uncommon for people to move every two or three years. But moving to a new, unfamiliar city or region is stressful and disturbing.

The truth is we need stability,

Reprinted from *Staying Sane In A World Of Uncertainty, Worldwide Church of God.*

structure and permanency to provide a solid foundation for mental health.

Psychologists speak of our “assumptive state”—that is, our assumption that certain things will be a certain way and we can count on it. A good example is the light switch. We assume it will be there in the night as we sleepily stumble down the hall. But most of us have felt the minor shock to our assumptive state which comes from being in a new or strange house where things aren’t where they are supposed to be. It’s unsettling and disruptive.

We all make these adjustments in time, of course, but too many changes in too many areas of our lives can be most disturbing. It’s hard to change houses, cities, friends, climates, jobs. We need to have mental assumptions that don’t change often. Too much change can become confusing and disorienting. We need to recognise this subtle hazard of our fast-paced, ever-changing lives.

A strong case can be made for rituals, routines and tradition. It’s good to have some things that are predictable and recurring, things that stay the same year after year and don’t change too much.

If you feel bombarded by constant change and stress it makes on your mind, body and emotions, think of ways to establish some traditions or routines to add stability to your life. You can learn to put things in the same place, do things at the same, regularly recurring time—such as mealtime, holidays or even the time you arise or go to bed. You can make a point of seeing some of the same people and sharing the same activities such as church services, a bowling league or weekly card game.

We’ve lost a lot of traditions in our world and seem to have forgotten their benefits, but it’s time to re-evaluate the benefits of regular routines and traditions as a mean of imparting order and stability to life.

sound mind

Be gainfully employed

It is clearly recognised today by professionals that unemployment is a threat to mental health.

Common problems faced by the unemployed, especially those who have been out of work for an extended period of times, include alcoholism, depression, low self-esteem and strained relationships with family and friends.

Many people quit their jobs because they don't like their work, which has become a source of frustration and stress. This can be a wise move, provided they are able to find a job they enjoy. But all too often, especially during economic hard times, it is difficult or nearly impossible to find another job.

Although job satisfaction is vital to health and well being, joining the ranks of the unemployed for a prolonged period of time can be worse than having a job we might not especially enjoy.

Our feelings about ourselves are very closely tied to our work, our jobs and our careers. We invest a lot of ourselves in our work, and the loss of a job can provoke a real mental and emotional health crisis.

Work gives most people a sense of accomplishment, productivity, usefulness, self-respect and challenge. It seems our psyches somehow need work.

Work also has the benefit of structuring our lives on a daily, seasonal and even life-long basis.

It should be obvious that good mental health hinges on many important factors in life, and work is a major one. It shouldn't be surprising then that retirement often provokes a crisis. Many faithful workers are often at a loss as to what to do with themselves. They may feel useless and idle. Not a few die soon after they quit working, as if somehow their work actually kept them alive and gave them a reward for living.

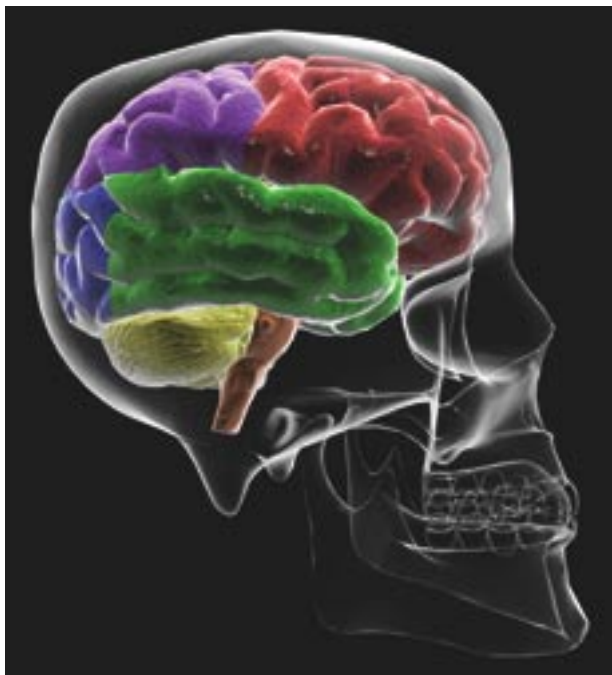
This isn't to say, however, that we should be "workaholics." That's not the right balance. But do

recognise the critical importance of this important area of life in maintaining mental health.

Value of recreation

Work is important, to be sure, but in the words of an old maxim, "All work and no play, makes Jack a dull boy." Today we might add, a highly stressed and maybe even "burned out" boy.

While it is true we need work in life, we also need recreation. It seems our minds and spirits function best when they have a



healthy balance between work and play. From time to time we need to recharge our batteries. Our minds need an occasional break, some rest, a change of scenery.

Sadly, some never realise their need for diversion or balanced recreation, and put relentless stress on their minds by demanding continual work and productivity of themselves. They are usually difficult to live or work with and lack a good balance.

Many great individuals who produced much in life have known the need for recreation. In the most demanding years of his leadership of Britain, at a time when the

whole burden of leadership rested on his shoulders, Winston Churchill either found time or made time to paint, to write and to lay bricks. These diversions lifted his spirits and gave him fresh energy to carry on his responsibilities

What about you? Do you know when "enough is enough"? When to put aside your work and get some balanced recreation to refresh your mind and body?

Some can hardly do so because they feel they are being lazy, guilty or somehow sinful if they aren't working all the time. The Bible doesn't support that unbalanced view on work. Jesus, in the midst of a particularly demanding time in his ministry, told the disciples, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."

Why? "For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat"¹

Occasionally getting away from our urban environment and visiting a wilderness area or national park can provide great healing benefits for a weary mind and body. There's an elegant simplicity and harmony in nature that simply cannot be found in the big city. The peace and serenity of the great outdoors has a calming effect on our spirit and helps us to be in touch with our Creator.

Although we all need recreation in balance to charge our batteries, some people end up making work out of their play by going at it too long and too hard. They pack too much into their weekends and vacations and wind up even more exhausted than before. We should be careful to get any change of pace in the right balance as well as getting it from the right kinds of experiences, the ones which have good outcomes and refresh our minds and bodies.

We need to see the mental health benefits of hobbies and activities that give us variety in life, stimulate our minds and refresh our spirits. Learn to protect yourself from mental exhaustion and burnout by giving yourself balanced recreation.

Take care of your body

Scientific research has been strongly emphasising what is strong called the “mind/body connection”. It is increasingly well understood that good physical health contributes to good mental health and vice versa. The two work hand in hand.

So in pursuit of good mental health, don’t forget the importance of a healthy body. Keep in mind that the brain, though imbued by God with spiritual properties, is a physical organ. Like any other organ of the body, it is dependent on things like oxygen, good blood circulation and adequate nutrition.

The brain, the most delicate organ of the body, is particularly sensitive

Let’s face it—we are physical human beings and therefore need to have the physical factors governing our lives and working for us, not against us.

To keep your mind healthy, keep your body healthy by proper diet, adequate sleep and regular exercise. Get plenty of fresh air and sunshine. Get out of doors regularly. The beauty of God’s creation lifts the spirit and clears the mind.

Careful attention to these physical factors will pay real dividends in your mental, emotional, and spiritual health and well being.

that “God is not the author of confusion.” He strives for order, harmony, balance and peace in his creation. We should do the same. A disordered house or apartment can make for a disordered mind.

Light, colour and beauty are important mental health considerations. Darkness, ugliness and disorienting sights have a depressing effect. Loud, unpleasant noises have a jangling effect on the nerves.

These are things that are constantly in our environment—but we needn’t be passive receptors. We can do something to change and improve the environments we live in.



to toxins, drugs and chemicals. You simply can’t abuse your body without abusing your brain and mind. Unfortunately, many children are born brain damaged because of what their parents did to their own bodies before conception or during pregnancy.

Simple physical exercise coupled with a balance diet can do much to overcome common mental problems such as depression. Accumulation of toxins in the blood stream is a prime explanation for headaches, low energy and “the blues.” Lack of sleep and resultant exhaustion and fatigue is another major cause of negative attitudes.

Create an uplifting environment

Where we live has an impact on how we live. Our environment contributes either positively or negatively to our mental health. But few see the importance of a good environment or see their ability to do something about it.

Let’s take a look at environmental factors. Starting with cleanliness and order.

Have you ever considered the mental consequences of living in a dirty, disordered, depressing environment? Disorder and confusion create problems for our minds.

In I Corinthians 14:33, we read

The least any of us can do is strive to be neat, clean and orderly. Much can be done to improve our environments by simple projects such as painting or wall papering a room, adding some colourful curtains or paintings. Lights can be added to drive away the dark and the gloom.

Take a serious look at your living quarters and assess whether they are adding to or subtracting from your overall mental health and happiness. See your environment as a factor either working for or against you at all times, and one you can do something about.

God and his commandments

Although listed last, this most important element will help ensure proper functioning of your mind.

Psychotherapy from Freud onward has struggled with the problem of “anxiety”. Just what is anxiety? And why are so many anxious, nervous and fearful?

One major explanation for anxiety seldom addressed in the field of psychology is simply guilt or feelings of guilt prompted by the conscience. Despite many assurances we shouldn't feel that way, the conscience doesn't conveniently go away—nor should it!

God has made us sensitive to the issue of right or wrong. Though science has a most difficult time explaining it, the conscience plays an active part in the mental life of most people.

Simply stated, we feel good about ourselves when we have done right and we usually feel anxious, disturbed and uneasy when we fail to behave in the right way.

Let's reintroduce the important function of the conscience. Pretending not to have a conscience or that we can simply adjust our consciences to approve of all behaviour doesn't work. Our inner moral guidance system is somehow not so easily deceived. It's as if in spite of attempts at self-justification, we know better.

That's one major reason why a life lived according to a high standard of moral conduct is better in terms of mental functioning. Obedience to God and His rules for living frees one from anxiety caused by a guilty conscience and feeling of substandard or immoral behaviour.

We feel right when we do what

is right. And ultimately, it is God through His Word and His law who defines right and wrong.

From the perspective of God and the Bible, the most important function of the mind centres on morality and right moral development. Other functions such as creativity, memory and problem-solving ability have their place and importance, to be sure, but right moral functioning is even more important to God and His purpose for man.

Without the ability to discern good from evil and act accordingly, we simply can't fulfil our destiny of attaining God's kingdom.

So in addition to other mental gifts and abilities, God has given us the capacity for moral development and the right use of conscience.

Many would prefer to believe there is no connection between morality and mental health and that we can live as we please without restraints of morality, and still have happy, sound minds. But the Bible teaches otherwise.

Jesus, speaking of God's ways and principles, said in John 13:17, “If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.” And Solomon long ago, summing up the book of Ecclesiastes, said: “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil.”²

Solomon had the wisdom to know there could be no better life than that lived according to and safely within the laws of God.

Life lived outside those laws runs enormous risks and lead to broken lives. Fear also accompanies law breaking, and as we read in 1 John

4:18, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment.”

These are admittedly “old-fashioned” views on the way our minds work. But what in our modern world has proven better? Have the permissive psychologies and therapies with their encouragement to “do their own thing,” without restraint or inhibition, proved better guides to sound mental functioning? Are we enjoying better mental health than ever because modern psychology has led to greater happiness and peace of mind? Few would seriously make that claim.

The principles of mental health, then, all begin with obedience to God and his laws. This vital key will enable us to attain the right functioning and soundness of mind and emotions that God wants each of us to have.

Review and reflect on these seven principles of good mental health. Evaluate how each of them can contribute to your own soundness of mind and recognise that how we think and feel is very much a matter of our own choosing. We are responsible for maintaining and building the right and proper use of our minds.

A sound mind, like a healthy body, is a precious gift and a great blessing, but each of us must do what it takes to build and preserve our mental health. No one else can do that for us.

Guard and protect your mind by following the principles which lead to sound-mindedness and good mental health. □

¹ Mark 6:31

² Ecclesiastes 12:13–14

What our readers say:

I am glad that THE PLAIN TRUTH still remains a reader friendly publication that presents its message clearly and simply. I look forward to seeing THE PLAIN TRUTH break through into the mass Christian market and eventually into the secular market. Malaysians need to have positive, bible-based: even if not overtly Christian values inputted into them in today's



materialistic society. I believe publication like THE PLAIN TRUTH and Asian Beacon will be able to play the role of society's Christian conscience and intellectual discourse.

I will pray for your ministry and may God bless the fruits of your faithful labour

Robert Kee
Klang

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.

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