

# THE **Plain Truth** ASIA

PP 12578/3/2006

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Dec-Jan 2006

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# Our civil responsibility

One of the most talked about issues today is corruption. Hardly a day goes by without our newspapers reporting cases of fraud, money laundering, bribery and alleged corruption in various offices. For sure, all this provides excited discussion during coffee breaks. It's also amazing how readily we condemn others as dishonest, unreliable, cheats, irresponsible and corrupt, especially if they are individuals of high repute. But are we ourselves so clean and without fault? How often have we tried to get our way by giving a bribe? Perhaps it was the time when we tried to persuade the police officer to let us go when we got caught for running through a red light. Or maybe we wanted our application form for an important matter to be processed before others. Or perhaps it was to assure us a place in a certain institution of higher learning or to get a certain license to do a business. We just had to get it done, so what is wrong with giving a little 'gift' to the people in charge? The problem is that in such instances, when we put ourselves first, we end up betraying our civil responsibility in society.

Many would say that in order to 'survive' we need to get the upper hand. Besides, if we don't do it, someone else would and we end up the losers. This kind of reasoning spirals into an unstoppable flood of corrupt practices that will eventually undermine the foundations of any nation. The Bible states that one who is greedy for bribes can actually tear a nation down.<sup>1</sup> Many people are very surprised to encounter an honest person who goes out of his way to provide a service without expecting anything in return. Noel Coward states 'It is discouraging to think how many people are shocked by what is honest and how few by deceit.' Is this the way we want our society to become?

The Prime Minister of Malaysia has set us an excellent example. There is no tolerance for corruption or bribery any more. Such integrity on his part has spurred many

Malaysians to come forward and show their support for his efforts to curb corruption. Many arrests have been made and a clear message has gone out to those who are set in their corrupt ways. On the other hand the nation is turning its focus on being a caring society. Could anything describe our civil responsibility better?

Today people are disturbed at the undisciplined behaviour of drivers on our roads. Simple requirements like obeying traffic rules are not adhered to. Unwillingness to obey speed limits is causing many to die in accidents every year. A



large number of those killed are youngsters. Vandalism is also a common problem everywhere. Public utilities are often damaged. Why is this so? Do we not realise that the level of development in a nation is not measured only by the abundance of technological advancements and modern utilities available. We must also show collective responsibility that ensures the safety and well being of all members of society. Jesus put it simply as "Love your neighbour as yourself."<sup>2</sup> By 'neighbour' He meant our fellow man, not just the people who live next door. When we drive our cars, it means that we do so aware that our behaviour must not cause someone else to be injured. When we use public utilities and facilities, it means that we make sure that we don't damage anything thereby causing

an inconvenience to others. We read of heartbreaking stories of people who could not call for help during a fire because all the public phones around the area were damaged by vandals.

Where should we begin in order to bring about a society free of corruption and irresponsible behaviour? The prime target for inculcating responsible attitudes is our younger generation.

Our youths and students in schools should be taught that true honour lies in the individual who can distinguish himself or herself as one who is blameless in their responsibilities especially when holding positions of importance.<sup>3</sup> Parents need to take an active role in teaching right behaviour to their children. Civil responsibility needs to be taught and emphasised in schools, but it must be backed up and reinforced at home. We must never allow our young people to accept bad behaviour as normal. It is imperative that the next generation, as they begin to take office in various positions of commerce and government have integrity as reliable, honest and responsible people. This is what really determines the direction a nation heads. Too many nations are in deep political and economic crisis because their leaders and people in authority have gone the way of corruption and deceit.

As we begin a New Year let us make a commitment that we would safeguard the sanctity of the offices that we hold, however great or small. Let us determine that we will not disgrace ourselves or our country by partaking or encouraging corruption. God Himself esteems us highly when we refuse to take or give a bribe against the innocent.<sup>4</sup> Plus let us also remember to instill responsible attributes in our children. As we do, we will each be playing our part in building Malaysia to be a great nation that is highly esteemed in the sight of others. □

<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 29:4

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 22:39

<sup>3</sup> Daniel 6: 3-4

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 15: 5

# THE Plain Truth <sup>ASIA</sup>

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding



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# What our readers say:

I have been a regular reader of THE PLAIN TRUTH for many years. I have learned a lot about Christianity including my wife and children by reading the articles. We have since followed the faith and got baptised on 6 February 2005.  
Anonymous

I have found many of the articles very enlightening about Jesus Christ and they contain plenty of wisdom, provide joy and meaning about life and the true story about Christ who died for us to forgive us our sins. In the present fast-changing world, we face many challenges and temptations that can easily corrupt our daily life. If we do not look to or seek for spiritual way of living our life on the earth, we will all soon be lost without knowing God and Jesus Christ, our Saviour.  
Anonymous

At this critical period near to end-times, we should all be looking, searching and praying to God and our lord, Jesus Christ for mankind amidst all the natural disasters and environmental problems lurking around us and the future generations, living in this troubled world.  
Anonymous

I would be particularly pleased if THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA could feature more articles on revelation and revival, and about many truths of the Bible. In the present ever-challenging world and the future well-being of mankind, there are still many unbelievers or lost people. Often enough, new religions simply emerge as people who do not believe, start to convince themselves for their earthly existence for wonderful and pleasurable lifestyles through geomancy, longevity or health foods, etc. Basically, more revelation and revival is needed to reform human



beings, help them to overcome such challenges and new religions.  
Anonymous

*Ed: We absolutely agree with you that many people are seeking answers to the complexities of life in our ever-changing and challenging world. They are searching for the meaning and purpose of life. And some are looking for answers from sources like geomancy, etc. but not from the true source—the living word of the Author of Life. THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA'S wishes is to help "make the Bible make sense" to its readers. We strive to show in practical ways how the gospel can be applied to the challenges we face in everyday life.*

I look forward to THE PLAIN TRUTH to continue, providing the truth through many of its articles in order for us to prevail over many critical life challenges as we move on deeper into uncertainty of this millennium.  
Lee Leok Soon & family  
Petaling Jaya

Some of the articles are inspirational and some are thought-provoking.  
Tan Hing Hock  
Kuala Lumpur

I enclose herewith a donation of RM 25.00 for the excellent work you are doing, not just for us Christians but for everybody.  
Many Thanks.  
Victor E Jesudoss  
Kuala Lumpur

*Ed: Thank you for your donation; your financial support is much appreciated. It will certainly help us to keep sending the magazine to those who request it.*

I have found your magazine to be good. You have some good writers. Do keep up the good work. God bless you, your family and all at THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA.  
Anonymous

I am 72 years old and I accepted the Lord in January 2003 and was baptised in May 2003. Formerly before becoming a Christian. I used to receive THE PLAIN TRUTH magazines from you. This was discontinued and I moved house 4 times and finally settling at above address with a Christian family. Please send to me any publication so that I may read, update and build my faith up.  
Thank you.  
Ooi Hock Swee  
Petaling Jaya

*Ed: Congratulations and welcome to the family of God. It is our pleasure and our hope to be able to continue sending you THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA—may you grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.*

Thank you very much for THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA magazine. I have enjoyed reading the articles and have given it to friends to read too.  
Dr Lucy Seet  
Singapore

**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.**

# Peace on Earth

“Two Canadian soldiers killed in blast” blared the newspaper headline.

Near Kabul, Afghanistan, two paratroopers from the 3rd Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment on a routine patrol were killed instantly when their Iltis utility vehicle struck a large land mine. Major General Andrew Leslie, commander of Canada’s 1,900 troops, also commander of the NATO-led International Security and Assistance Force said, “The mission we are on is a good one. It is to protect the people of Afghanistan from predators and terrorists.” When we think of peace, we usually associate it with the absence of war. However, the peace of God is much more.

Back in the first century, the “Pax Romana” (Roman Peace) brought a cessation of fighting to much of Europe and the Middle East. It was at this time that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He began his life as a fetus in his mother’s womb. The traditional date for the beginning of Mary’s pregnancy is March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation (formerly called the Feast of the Incarnation). Christmas is the time Christians have chosen to celebrate the birth of Jesus for almost 2,000 years.

An angel gave the shepherds in the field a sign: the baby will be wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. “Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head; the stars in the sky looked down where he

lay, the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.” These words capture the serenity of the birth, illustrating both his humanity and his humility.

“It is by far the most amazing miracle of the entire Bible... the fact that the infinite, omnipotent, eternal Son of God could become man and join himself to human nature... will remain for eternity the most profound miracle and the most profound mystery in all the universe.”<sup>1</sup> No wonder the angels

by  
**David  
Sheridan**

Immanuel—God with us.<sup>2</sup> Jesus is the ultimate peacemaker.

The peace of God is a product of the glory of God. The majestic Latin phrase *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* (Glory to God in the highest) is an important part of the peace process. The glory of God leads to the peace of God. True peace is given to those who praise and worship God.

Singing Christmas carols is one way of expressing our adoration of God.

“Silent Night! Holy night! All is calm, all is bright, Round yon virgin Mother and Child, Holy infant, so tender and mild, sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.” These words remind us that all is well in heaven if not on earth. “Hark, the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn king, Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!” In Christ, humanity will yet bear perfectly the image of the God of peace and find heavenly peace.

The peace of God is given to “men on whom his favor rests.” Those who

sang praises for this incarnation event.

The peace of God is offered to everyone as a free gift. It is the result of God with us. The Creator became as one of the created; the immortal became mortal. As a baby, he smiled and cried like any other; he learned to crawl and later to walk; he learned to talk and became familiar with the Aramaic, Greek and Hebrew languages. Jesus had human emotion, intellect and personality.

He was made like us in every way except for sin. Jesus is the unique God-man, the mediator between God and humans. He is

<sup>1</sup> Grudem, Wayne. 1994. *Systematic Theology*. Zondervan. p.563

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 1:23

<sup>3</sup> John 14:27

trust in Jesus Christ experience a new birth and are placed through adoption into a right relationship with God by God’s grace. One of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is peace. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”<sup>3</sup>

True peace is heaven on earth! Peace of mind and spirit come to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ. Glory to God in the highest! On earth, peace to all as we celebrate the birth of Jesus. □





# Sitting on

Be-coming grandparents is a special milestone in life—one which my husband and I have embraced with much enthusiasm. It has given us the opportunity to revisit the experience of having children and rekindled the protective, nurturing emotions we gradually had to let go as our sons matured.

Our bond with our grandson seems to be more free-flowing, more immediate than even the bond was with our sons. That bond was strong and sure, but tinged with so much responsibility that often we didn't let ourselves savour the moment. Not so with little Zachary. And he now has a baby sister who will expand our love and attachment yet again.

Loving my grandchildren has given me a new understanding of how God feels about me. When we think what it means to have God as a father, like most things in life, our first

response is “how does it affect me?” We add up the benefits to us, like security, love, a sense of belonging. So for just a few moments let's attempt to look at it from the other side—What does it mean to God to have children?

The Bible tells us we are made in God's image. And part of the

by  
**Ruth  
Matthews**

experience He built into our lifespan is the opportunity to live as husband/wife—to bring children into the world. And although as Paul phrased it, our experience can only be “through a glass darkly,” our experience as parents gives us a window into what it means to God to have children.

A young mother described her introduction to parenthood this

*her in the bedside bassinet... and climbed into bed after checking on her several times, just to make sure she was OK. Then I got back up and just stared at her. I felt as if my heart swelled several sizes and then I burst into tears. I was absolutely overwhelmed by the need to protect her, love her... The world seemed to stop spinning; only she and I existed. Nothing else mattered... I*



way (Reflections on Motherhood: Deana's Story. 9 Jan 2005. [www.parentsplace.com](http://www.parentsplace.com)):

*I tried to rest that first night, after giving birth, but I couldn't sleep. I kept my baby with me most of the day. I counted her fingers and toes, I nursed (breast fed) her... Later that night I nursed her to sleep and put*

*would sacrifice anything to protect my children. Before having children, I didn't realise what it was like to love in this way.*

A moving description—a very female, motherly response we might say. But weren't we supposed to be looking at God as Father?

# His knee

Yet in the book of Isaiah God describes himself in this way:

“Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice O earth; burst in to song, O mountains. For the Lord comforts His people and will have compassion on His afflicted ones... Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands...”<sup>1</sup>

God reaches out to each of us with the care and protectiveness of a new mother. When a new child enters the family and learns to smile at mum, or dad, or reaches out his chubby little hand to grab nana or papa’s finger—you feel something—it’s a physical welling up of emotion—the connection is palpable. God is like a mother nursing an infant—He feels the connection with us. When we reach out to Him we are not just one of the 6 billion plus other people on earth. We are someone He loves, someone He is connected to!

Another young woman reflected on becoming a mother and wrote (Reflections on Motherhood: Gayle’s Story. 9 Jan 2005. [www.parentsplace.com](http://www.parentsplace.com)):

*Becoming a mother has offered me a capacity to love and protect that I had not known before. I remember gently swinging on my hammock in the backyard, my seven-month-old son snuggled sleepily to my chest. As we swayed rhythmically side to side, listening to the birds, smelling the moist earth after a morning rain, suddenly our movement flipped us into the air. I arched my body instantly, maneuvering myself in an indescribable way to land below my, rather than on top of him, as gravity would have it. He landed safely upon me. It was a complete and instinctual love that caused me to protect him with myself. It is a beautiful and satisfying feeling to care this deeply.*

Remember that instinctive yearning when your child was in trouble? There is an automatic response to danger we feel for our children/grandchildren even when the danger is a result of the child being where he wasn’t supposed to be—swimming where he wasn’t supposed to or running into the road or down a dangerous path. We are moved to protect, to save. God feels the same yearnings. Jesus Himself said: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.”<sup>2</sup> God’s parental desire towards us is just as strong as any that we have felt—but He has allowed us the option of choosing or rejecting His offers to rescue and nurture us.

In Isaiah God describes His ultimate desire for a relationship with all His children—a yet future time when the message of the Kingdom will see completeness, and likens Himself again to a mother: “For thus says the Lord, behold, I extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall be nursed, you shall be carried on the hip and fondled on the knees! As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. Then you shall see this and your heart shall be glad...”<sup>3</sup>

Each of us as a parent or grandparent can think of times when being a parent was an exquisitely beautiful experience. Maybe it was baby’s first smile that you can still picture as if it were yesterday—or the first steps—or an especially precious conversation with a three year old—a child’s smile that lit up your world and welcomed you home from work or from a time away. Relive in your mind for a moment one of your own unique parenting experiences. It was those special times that made

all the rest of it—the runny noses, sleepless nights, dirty nappies, and naughtiness—all more than worth it. Think of that special moment—the poem your 8-year-old wrote you on Mother’s day—the picture your son drew for you when you were sick—how beautiful your daughter looked at graduation—whatever is your most precious memory of your child or grandchild... and relive it! The heartfelt response, the emotions experienced then well up again as the scene replays in your mind. It’s a visceral reaction—you can feel it in your very being.

Now, hold on to that feeling, that emotion—while remembering that you are a child of God. Have you ever considered that as a child of God, you elicit in Him that same depth of emotion?

“As a father loves and pities his children, so the Lord loves and pities those who fear Him—with reverence, worship and awe. For he knows our frame; He earnestly remembers and imprints on His heart that we are dust... the mercy and loving-kindness of the Lord are from everlasting to everlasting... and His righteousness is to children’s children.”<sup>4</sup>

It is reminiscent of that lovely phrase Paul used which the King James Version translates ‘bowels of mercies’<sup>5</sup> which we are to show one another—the bowels of mercy, the compassion, the loving-kindness, all poured out on us by our Father—which He pours out on us simply because that is how being our Parent makes him feel. And then He asks us as His children to share that compassion, loving-kindness, and mercy with one another so freely that the entire world will know we are children of God.<sup>6</sup> □

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 49:13–16

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 23:27 (NASB)

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 66:12–14 (NASB)

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 103:13–17 (Amplified)

<sup>5</sup> Colossians 3:12 (NASB)

<sup>6</sup> John 4:13 (NASB)

# From consumer worshippers

Worship is vital for connecting with our Creator. It is the means by which we communicate with God. In worship, we thank Him for all His blessings, and we share with Him our thoughts and feelings, our goals and plans, and our joys and sorrows. We also make intercessions for ourselves and for others, as well as listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. This in essence is the purpose of worship.

## Acceptable worship

Because worship is vital to our relationship with God, we need to worship Him in an acceptable manner.<sup>1</sup> Worshipping acceptably often brings blessings such as answered prayers, faith, hope, joy and peace of mind. Although God is merciful, worshipping in the wrong way, on the other hand, may result in unanswered prayers, frustration, anger and unbelief. So we need to worship Him acceptably. How do we do that?

## Two types of worshippers

Worshippers fall into two types—*consumer worshippers* and *consumed worshippers*. Consumer worshippers worship God with a consumer mindset. They focus *primarily* on themselves and their 'rights'. Because they perform religious duties, contribute money or do charitable deeds (e.g. helping the poor), they feel God is obliged to answer their prayers.

Consumed worshippers, on the other hand, are totally consumed in their worship of God. They acknowledge God as a kind, benevolent and sovereign king and joyfully serve Him.

## Consumer worshippers

Although consumers may have the right to report to consumer associations if the products (or services) they buy are defective or unsatisfactory, we must, however, be careful not to carry our 'rights' when worshipping God. (For one thing, we really don't have any rights. God is our Creator, and by virtue of that, He



by  
**Dr. P.  
Sellappan**

can do whatever pleases Him. He owes us nothing, but we owe Him everything including our lives. We are totally dependent on Him.)

The consumer mindset can take several forms:

### 1. *Focuses on the self and the here-and-now*

The consumer worshipper focuses his attention primarily on the self and the here-and-now. He wants God to meet all his needs and desires—as quickly as possible. Not that they are all wrong. We need God's intervention, so we need to ask Him. But if we put our needs above God's will for us (e.g. developing spiritual attributes such as patience, faith and hope) they can become a stumbling block in our worship of God.

The Bible gives many examples of consumer worshippers. In one incident, after Jesus had fed 5,000-plus people, many followed Him the next day. They followed Him not because they wanted to hear His teachings, but for free meals. He told them, "I tell you the truth; you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food which spoils, but for food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval"<sup>2</sup>. They just wanted Jesus to satisfy their immediate needs, but He asked them to focus their minds on something more lasting—eternal life.

In another story, a rich ruler who had everything going for him wanted to know how he could enjoy his good fortune as long as possible. He asked Jesus what he needed to do to receive eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments to which he

promptly responded that he had been keeping them all his life. Jesus added, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." But the man went away sorrowful because he was very rich.<sup>3</sup> It never occurred to him that he could share the blessings with others. Many of us are like that. We focus on the self and on the here-and-now, not on the true riches God is offering (love, joy, peace and eternal life).

### 2. *Wants answers without obeying*

Consumer worshippers want God to answer their prayers, not to tell them how to live their lives. They don't see Him as Sovereign Ruler who is to be obeyed. They see Him as a problem solver—One who can be called upon to solve their family, financial and health problems. They don't want Him to tell them to change their lifestyle. Jesus warned His followers, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven".<sup>4</sup> He told them to obey His commands and do His will. On another occasion, He rebuked the Pharisees for professing devotion to Him but their hearts were far from Him. They were worshipping Him in vain.<sup>5</sup>

The apostle James also wrote to 1st-century Christians (and to us now), "You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you



# r to consumed worshipper



may spend what you get on your pleasures.”<sup>6</sup> God didn’t grant them their requests because they wanted blessings without obedience to His commands. Although God gives material blessings to both the wicked and the righteous<sup>7</sup>, spiritual blessings (peace, joy, security, eternal life) come only when we obey Him. Many people want His blessings but are not willing to commit their lives to Him.

### 3. *Expects church to meet their requests*

Consumer worshippers go to church with certain expectations and if those expectations are not met quickly, they become disillusioned. For example, they may go to church for healing and if they are not healed immediately, they leave. As contributors, they may make some recommendations and expect the church to adopt them. For example, they may take a certain stand on an issue and if the leadership fails to adopt it, they threaten to leave.

Worshipping God with a consumer mindset is unhealthy because it doesn’t please or glorify God. Nor does it edify others or help the worshipper to experience God. As followers of Jesus, we need to guard our minds against such a mindset.

### **Consumed worshipper**

Consumed worshippers, on the other hand, are totally consumed in their worship of God. They are devoted and committed to Him. They trust God’s goodness and faithfulness and want to serve Him joyfully. This mindset can take several forms:

#### 1. *Focuses on God*

A consumed worshipper focuses his mind on God and the things of God.<sup>8</sup> He believes living God’s way produces love, joy, peace and happiness. He believes in God’s offer of salvation through Jesus Christ, so he partners with God to develop these spiritual

qualities.

Many people today spend their time and energy trying to make a living, care for their family, accumulate wealth and seek pleasures. Not that all these are wrong. But a life consisting only of these things misses God's purpose for us. God created us for a much higher purpose—to become His children and to live with Him eternally. He wants us to have a personal relationship with Him, and enjoy His peace and happiness. That's why Jesus told His followers "to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness"<sup>9</sup>.

## 2. *Submits to God's will*

A consumed worshipper acknowledges God as King and Ruler and gladly submits to His will. Jesus sets the example. The author of the book of Hebrews writes, "Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, "Here

I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.'" First he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them' (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, 'Here I am, *I have come to do your will.*'<sup>10</sup> Although Jesus was the Son of God, He did not insist on His divine rights. He submitted to His Father's will, even to death on a cross. The apostle Paul exhorts us to seek that kind of attitude. He writes, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God

something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"<sup>11</sup>

## 3. *Has a servant attitude*

Many slaves in ancient times didn't have any 'human rights'. They had to please their masters who bought them. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Master, we become His slaves and we seek to please Him because He is a kind, gentle and benevolent Master (unlike some human masters).

blessings of peace, joy and happiness.<sup>13</sup>

Jesus kept His Father's commands and exhorted His disciples to do likewise—love God and love one another. The author of the book of Hebrews writes, "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission. Although He was a son, He learned *obedience* from what He suffered and, once made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who *obey Him*".<sup>14</sup>

## 5. *Is zealous for God*

A consumed worshipper serves God with zeal and enthusiasm, not half-heartedly. In one incident in the temple, Jesus was so angry with the moneychangers that He overturned their tables and chased them away. They were exploiting the people and turned the place of worship into a market place. He

was consumed in His zeal for God.<sup>15</sup>

The apostle Paul exhorts us, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works".<sup>16</sup>

Just before His death, Jesus told His disciples, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many".<sup>12</sup>

## 4. *Loves God's ways*

A consumed worshipper delights in God's ways. He knows they are holy and good and keeping them brings





6. *Uses God's gifts to serve*  
 The second great commandment tells us to love our neighbour as ourselves.<sup>17</sup> God has endowed us with different gifts and He wants us to use them to serve one another. The apostle Paul writes, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully".<sup>18</sup>  
 The apostle Peter also exhorts us to use these gifts. He writes, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he

should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen".<sup>19</sup>

**Giving our all**

An ancient ritual in the Old Testament describes this consumed mindset symbolically (Leviticus, chapter 1). Whenever the Israelites appeared before God at the tabernacle, they brought with them offerings. They offered several types of offerings; one of them was the burnt offering. In Hebrew, it means ascending (as in going upward in smoke). An animal (e.g. a bull or a goat) was put on the altar and was burned completely. It was totally consumed so that nothing was available for any other purpose. The ascending smoke symbolised that it was offered to God in heaven. For the Israelites, the burnt offering symbolised God's acceptance of them and their total dedication to Him.

God wants us to worship Him with our all. The apostle Paul tells us, "So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take

your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognise what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you".<sup>20</sup>

True worship is giving our all to God—our energy, our time, our desire and our will. Jesus tells us to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind".<sup>21</sup>

Moving from a consumer mindset to a consumed mindset is a process. It takes time. We must open our heart and let the Holy Spirit come into our lives so that He can help us worship God with this mindset as Christ did.<sup>22</sup> □

- <sup>1</sup> Hebrews 12:28
- <sup>2</sup> John 6:26–27
- <sup>3</sup> Luke 18:22–23
- <sup>4</sup> Matthew 7:21
- <sup>5</sup> Matthew 15:7–9
- <sup>6</sup> James 4:2–3
- <sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:45
- <sup>8</sup> Colossians 3:1–2
- <sup>9</sup> Matthew 6:33
- <sup>10</sup> Hebrews 10:5–10
- <sup>11</sup> Philippians 2:5–8
- <sup>12</sup> Mathew 20:25–28
- <sup>13</sup> Romans 7:12
- <sup>14</sup> Hebrews 5:7–9
- <sup>15</sup> John 2:13–17
- <sup>16</sup> Titus 2:11–14
- <sup>17</sup> Mathew 22:37–40
- <sup>18</sup> Romans 12:6–8
- <sup>19</sup> 1 Peter. 4:10–11
- <sup>20</sup> Romans 12:1–2 (Message version)
- <sup>21</sup> Matthew 22:37
- <sup>22</sup> Philippians 1:6



# Disaster in N

In what may be America's worst natural disaster, nearly a million people have been displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Ten of thousands were stranded in New Orleans without power, without food, without drinkable water, without sanitation, without medical services, without police. New Orleans grabbed the headlines because it involved the most people, but the destruction was severe in southern Mississippi and Alabama, too.

One tragedy piled on top of another to make them all worse. If only the city had been built in a better place. If only the people had built better levees. If only they had evacuated before the hurricane hit. If only the government had acted quicker to bring food and water, and to transport the refugees. If only...

## Where was God?

All sorts of human decisions contributed to the tragedy, but it was nevertheless a natural disaster—nature gone awry—an “act of God”. Where was God when the hurricane hit land? Where was He when the 140-mph winds hit Mississippi? Where was He when the levee broke? Where was He when the people were trapped inside their attics when the water rose too high?

God was there, on the ground, in His people, suffering along with them. When one part of the body suffers, Paul said, every part suffers with it<sup>1</sup>—and that includes the head of the body, Jesus Christ. He suffers with us—He has proven His willingness to do it before, and He does it time and time again. God loves His people—He loves even the people who do not believe in Him—He loves them enough to send His Son to die for them. When we grieve, He grieves, too. When we suffer, He suffers, too.

God is big enough and powerful enough to do something about it. Sometimes He intervenes, and we hear stories of miraculous intervention—but often we do not. Maybe the hurricane could have hit harder and stronger than it did,

by  
**Joseph Tkach**

but still, it killed several hundred people. God could have stopped it entirely, so that it didn't kill any people at all, didn't cause any property damage at all, and yet He did not.

Whether the disasters are small or large, why does God let them happen? Frankly, we do not know the complete answer. The Bible does tell us that when sin entered the world, God said that nature itself would work against

waits for the day when it “will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom”<sup>4</sup>. Frankly, we do not know how physics would function without “decay” of some sort, and we do not know how God will fix the problem. But we do know that there is something wrong with nature, caused by sin, and God had chosen to allow that—even with the difficulties it causes, even though those “difficulties” are



Photo: Bob M

the people. “Cursed is the ground because of you... It will produce thorns and thistles... until you return to the ground”<sup>2</sup>. When the first people sinned, nature itself went awry—and nature will win over every person, and every person will return to the dust from which they came. Old age will strike—unless something else does first—and nature will have its say.

Paul says that creation itself “was subjected to frustration”<sup>3</sup>, and it

sometimes huge disasters that kill thousands of innocent people. Sin often affects innocent people, and sin has somehow affected nature itself.

We may pray for the day when “the times comes for God to restore everything”<sup>5</sup>, but we still have to live in the world gone awry.

## Looking to Jesus

Jesus saved His disciples from a natural disaster—the storm on

# New Orleans

the sea of Galilee. He saved Paul and his companions on a storm-caused shipwreck near Malta. But nature still had its way, for they all eventually died. Many were killed by evil people, others by disease (another example of nature gone awry), some by old age. God allows nature to take its toll. Not forever, not permanently, but God still lets it happen. Someday, I suppose, we will see how magnificent the plan is, but for

people to suffer the consequences of a world messed up by sin, where even the forces of nature work against us.

Jesus talked about another disaster in Jerusalem: the tower of Siloam fell and killed 18 people. It was not a natural disaster, of course, but a disaster nonetheless, a tragedy that killed innocent people. Jesus did not spend time blaming the engineers or the builders. Instead, He turned to the

that's the lesson we need to consider from these tragedies. We need to turn to God, to trust Him even when the "acts of God" strike close to home.

During his tremendous trial, Job said, "Though He slay me, yet will I hope in him"<sup>8</sup>. We need a similar kind of trust—knowing that the God who did not spare His own Son will never cut us off, though we walk into the valley of the shadow of death, though we enter death itself. The God who spared not His own Son also rescued His Son after He went through that valley, and He promises to rescue us, too. He will give us life again, but to do it, we live in a world that takes life away.

If Jesus were talking to the families of the 18 people killed by the tower collapse, He no doubt would have been as compassionate as He was with the man born blind. When we are dealing with the victims of Hurricane Katrina or any other disaster, we need compassion, too—compassion that motivates us to help. Many of you have given generously, and no doubt will continue to help during the long recovery period. But we also need to examine ourselves. When tragedy strikes someone else, we do not need to ask where God is—we need to ask where we are, and whether we can do something about it. The only thing worse than nature gone awry is a heart gone cold.

Can we trust God even when nature strikes us dead? Yes, we should, for one way or another, nature will strike every one of us dead. We have nowhere else to turn, for God has the only solution to the problem. But we need to trust Him.

When disaster strikes, God is there, suffering in His people, and working in His people. Therefore, when disaster strikes, God's people can be found standing with Him, not casting blame, but helping out, making a positive difference, loving as Jesus loves. □



Millan / FEMA

now it seems quite messy.

Jesus talked about a natural disaster in one man's life. Who sinned, the disciples asked: this man, or his parents? Neither one, said Jesus.<sup>6</sup> Not all problems can be pinpointed to a particular sin. It's just that nature doesn't always work the way it is supposed to, and for this particular man, the result was a disaster in his own life. Jesus fixed that particular problem, but most of the time, He allows His

audience and said, "Unless you repent, you too will all perish."<sup>7</sup> Take that disaster, and instead of blaming somebody, examine yourself. Get your priorities in order, and the chief priority is your relationship with God.

Bad things happen to good people as well as to the bad. The disaster that hit someone else could have just as easily hit us. God could allow it to hit us just as well as He could allow it to hit them—

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:26

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 3:17–19

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:20

<sup>4</sup> Romans 8:21

<sup>5</sup> Acts 3:21

<sup>6</sup> John 9:1–3

<sup>7</sup> Luke 13:4–5

<sup>8</sup> Job 13:15

# Do I make my

Paul's instruction to husbands to love their wives is probably almost as well known as his instruction to wives to submit to their husbands. Whether or not it gets as much airtime in the contemporary church I am not prepared to say, but that men should carefully study it is beyond dispute.

Ephesians 5:25–33 says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church... for we are members of His body. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

“Husbands love your wives” seems to be simple and rather obvious. Yet, I got quite an eye-opener when I finally took the time to “inwardly digest” what Paul actually said. Part of the problem with this teaching is the confusion over what we understand—or more accurately, what the Apostle meant—by love. Our ideas of loving are greatly conditioned by our environments, our culture, and our upbringing.

In my pre-marital counseling with young couples, I often asked them, “Were you loved as a child?” And “How do you know?” The answers caused me to ponder the question, “Do our ideas of love condition our reading of such Scriptures, as ‘Husbands love your wives?’” I have no doubt they do—and that can be dangerous.

Let me introduce you to a lovelorn couple as they answer my two questions. “Oh yes,” she replies, “Yeah. I guess I was loved. My dad never said anything; I never saw him and my mother being affectionate. He came to some of my games and if I played well he said, ‘You did well, son,’ but if I didn’t he bawled me out. He died when I was a teenager and I cried because I wanted to talk to him, but it was too late. I think he loved me.”

This young couple may be heading for marital problems because their understanding and expectations of love are so different, but for our purposes this kind of conversation shows how our views of love are developed. Did Paul mean I should love my wife like my dad showed his love for my mother, or should I love her the way men in my culture treat women? Let’s find out!

## Love as Christ loved the Church

This takes the contemporary culture way of looking at love out of the picture right away. The love of Christ for the church is historically verifiable, and clearly portrayed. No man should be confused about the kind of loving that is required of him. But how exactly did Christ love the church? By giving Himself up for her! That means His love was sacrificial and costly. Now I could be wrong about this, but I get the impression that men are not particularly geared to thinking of ways they can sacrifice as a means of expressing love for their wives. Should she be publicly insulted, he will face a hostile crowd and stand by her side. But voluntarily sacrificing?

I remember talking about this to a group of men in Johannesburg, South Africa. They were all excited about a rugby match between South Africa and Australia. When I asked, how many had tickets for the game, a forest of hands shot enthusiastically into the air. So I said, “Okay men. Here’s

by  
**Stuart  
Briscoe**

a challenge for you. How many of you would be willing to give away your tickets and tell your wife that you will miss the game in order to take her shopping on Saturday afternoon?” There was a brief stunned silence, and then a corporate groan followed by a chorus, “Stuart, that’s going too far!”

## Love as our own bodies

A man, according to Paul, should love his wife as he loves himself. This should come as no surprise to any man who knows that Christians are called to love their neighbours as themselves—and wives are pretty close neighbours! Psychologists say some of us need to learn to love ourselves before we can love our neighbours as ourselves. Paul would be flabbergasted if he ever heard that kind of exegesis! I do not dispute that many people suffer from a low self-image and need to learn their true worth before God. But this is not what the ancient commandment refers to. Paul was talking about our innate, instinctive sense of our own primacy and importance.

Most humans—particularly men—have a finely developed sense of self-preservation and self-love. It shows itself in impatience on the freeway and importance in the pecking order. Loving your wife as yourself is all about thinking your wife is as important as you—and showing it!

We all know that men love their own bodies. So Paul says men should love their wives as they love their own bodies. Having said metaphorically that the husband is the head of the wife, Paul now takes the metaphor further and implies, “Men, if you’re the head, your wife is the body.”

Headless bodies are no more use than bodiless heads. Paul is saying husband and wife are indispensable to each other. When God joins two people together, they become one. Head and body



# wife radiant?

are interdependent, intimately related. The man who introduces his wife as “my other half,” gets it right. He may even go so far as to say, “my better half.” That might be even more right.

But the point is to love her indispensability, the fusing of her being with yours to make a new entity—something only God can do.

## Love intentionally

Paul tells us that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her in order that He might procure a beautiful bride for Himself. To do that He offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice for sin, and then began a process of sanctification that would only end when redeemed sinners find themselves in His glorious company in eternity.

In a similar way, the love of a husband for his wife should be intentional. He can't make her perfect, but he can

work hard to sacrifice his own selfishness in order to give her the chance to be all that God intended her to be. A friend of mine was studying Ephesians 5 one day, and on reading the passage I have been talking about, he noted that the

Bride of Christ will eventually be “radiant.” This started him thinking: “Do I make my wife radiant?” So he asked her. After ascertaining that, he really wanted her to tell him the



truth, she replied, “Frankly, no. You don't make me radiant.”

She told him that he was inordinately selfish, rarely considered her wishes, never asked for her opinion, and should they have a disagreement he would

always go right ahead with his own plans anyway. As a result she was disappointed and frustrated. Not a very fulfilled, radiant lady! I'm afraid when I look at the earlier days of my own marriage; I have to plead guilty to many of the same things.

So what should we men do about loving our wives? First of all, we should banish secular and cultural ideas on the subject to oblivion and carefully study the biblical norm. Then we should see this as an ideal at which we should aim. Remember, “He who aims at nothing usually hits it!” Finally, we should bear in mind continually that all Paul's teaching on marriage and family in Ephesians hinges on his command in verse 18, “Be filled with the Spirit.” Healthy marriages and families are produced only in the fullness of the Spirit for the simple reason that no human being—man or woman—has the ability to emulate Christ in his or her own strength.

Marriages are too important, and wives are too precious, for men to get their “husbanding” wrong. Any man reading the Scriptures knows that to be a husband is a high calling, and to be a partner in a marriage is to participate in something uniquely beautiful and blessed—something that only God could have planned and only He can accomplish. And incredibly, He allows us to be part of it! □

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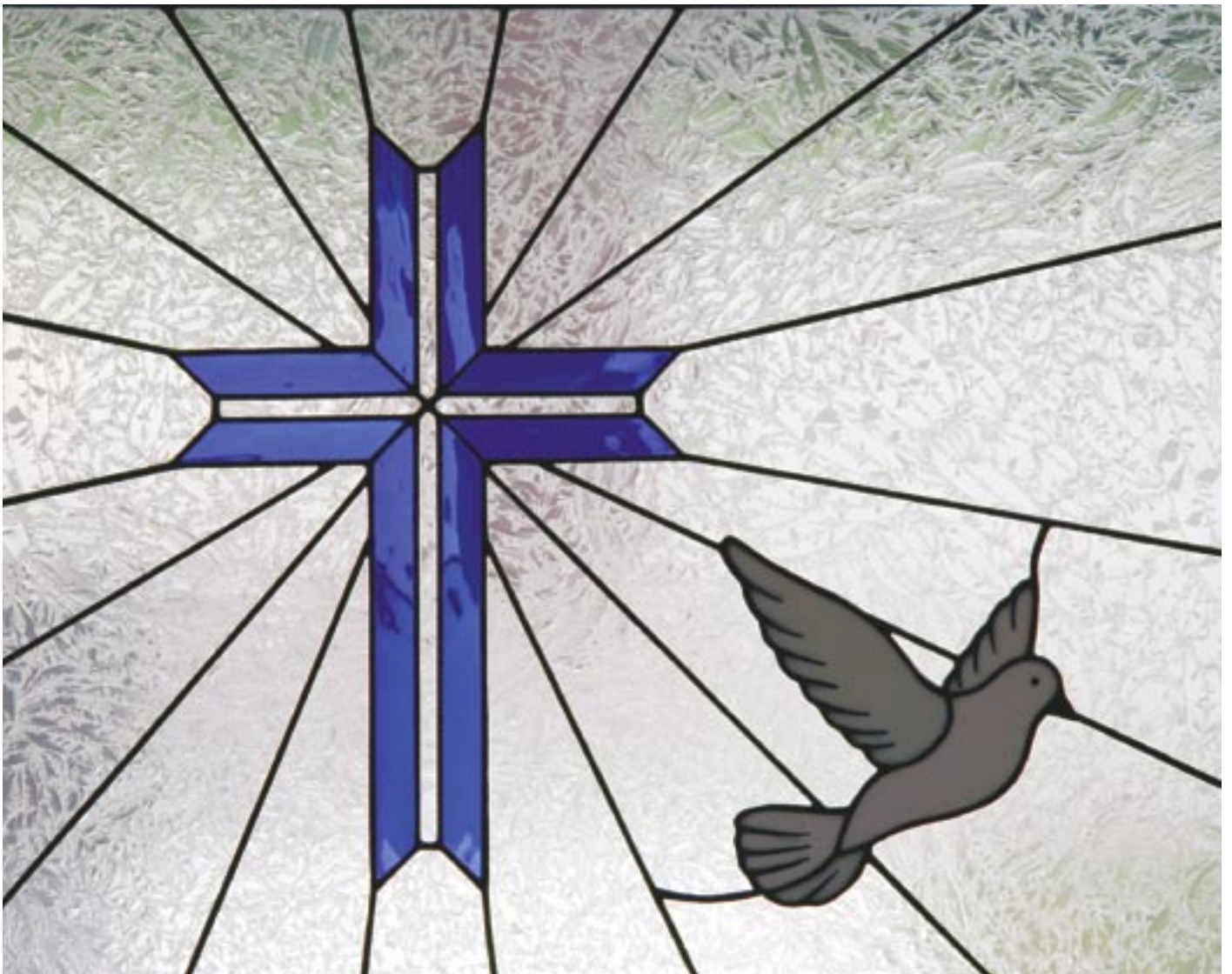
# When Isaiah

How would we react if we saw Jesus Christ in all of His heavenly splendor and glory? The Apostle John tells us that the Old Testament prophet Isaiah actually did see the glory of Christ.<sup>1</sup> And indeed Isaiah left us a record of his personal encounter with the Lord. It was the time when the Lord called Isaiah to be a prophet. And what a life-

year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another, and said, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of

by  
**Paul Hailey**

in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of Hosts.' Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged.'



changing event that was! Let's look at this event, and see how it changed the young man Isaiah into a mighty servant of God.

## **Isaiah's vision**

Here is what Isaiah wrote: "In the

hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!' And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'"<sup>2</sup>

Isaiah saw a manifestation of Christ's majesty and holiness—His heavenly throne with magnificent

# saw The Lord

angels in His presence declaring His holiness and glory. Upon hearing a thunderous voice Isaiah was severely shaken. We might say he was all shook up. When he saw the radiant purity of the Lord he became shamefully aware of his own sinfulness. He felt he was done for and was troubled in the Lord's presence. He also realised the sinfulness of the world around him. But God mercifully and dramatically offered him forgiveness. The vision of the angel bringing a live coal to his lips may seem strange. But live coals were associated with Old Covenant sin offerings. This gesture was symbolic of atoning for his sins. The angel told him "Your sin is purged". Gone! God took away his guilt, giving him reassurance that he was now OK in the eyes of the Lord.

## Isaiah's response

Then we read of Isaiah's remarkable reaction to God's question, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Isaiah emphatically said, "Send me!"

Many of the Old Testament prophets were reluctant to do God's bidding—"Who me?", "Send someone else!" But not Isaiah. "Send me!" And Isaiah went, boldly proclaiming the Lord's message for perhaps 70 years, finally to be martyred. Tradition says that the wicked King Manasseh had the aged Isaiah fastened between two boards and sawn in half.

## New Testament parallels

Let's now look in the New Testament, where we see some parallels between Isaiah's experience and those of our own.

I do hope however that none of us gets sawn in half!

What about our encounter with the Lord? How have we responded to His intervention in our lives? How should we respond?

When we see the holiness of the Lord, we should see ourselves differently. We recognise that we are sinners, and we may feel unclean like Isaiah did, and uncomfortable in God's presence. This seems to be a common experience. When Peter began to realise who his friend Jesus really was he said, "...Depart from me, for

prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"<sup>4</sup>

Like Isaiah, when we understand God's all-encompassing grace and forgiveness we too should be relieved. God brought the live coals to Isaiah's lips, showing him that his sins were purged. The Old Testament sacrifices pointed ahead to the New Testament reality of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As it says in 1 John 1:7, the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. His sacrifice

touches each one of us personally as soon as we accept Him as our Lord and Savior. Our sins are gone! What a wonderful feeling it is to know that!

When we see the holiness and love of the Lord, like Isaiah we should yearn to serve our loving Creator. We live in a world of hurt and we should feel compelled to reach out to others in personal service as well as spread the message of salvation.

We may not have seen the Lord as dramatically as Isaiah did, but we have tasted of His love,

His goodness and His mercy, as He speaks to us in His word and in our consciences. Has our encounter with the Lord changed our entire lives as it did Isaiah?

Like Isaiah, we see that we are sinners.

Like Isaiah, we see that the world is full of sinners who are in need of salvation.

Like Isaiah, we can humbly accept His loving forgiveness.

And like Isaiah we can and should fully commit ourselves into His service. It is a joy to serve our Lord. Let us all go before Him and say, "Lord, send me!" □



<sup>1</sup> John 12:41

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 6:1-8

<sup>3</sup> Luke 5:8

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 23:37



# Resolve to succeed

Are conflicts in a marriage normal? Should they be ignored or dealt with? Should they destroy a marriage? Or can conflicts be stepping stones towards greater understanding?

Human relationships, more often than not, confront problems and obstacles. This is especially true in any marital relationship. Husbands and wives having to regularly deal with conflicts are a common occurrence.

Sadly, such conflicts tend to strain many relationships. There are cases where husbands and wives have allowed irreparable damage to be inflicted to their relationships on account of relatively insignificant controversies. As a result divorce is increasingly becoming a reality, even in Asian society.

Conflicts do not have to tear a relationship apart. Differences, if tackled properly, can even be an impetus to the relationship's growth and good health. Good marriages are not so because of absence of conflict but, because of effective conflict resolution.

Here are six ways differences can be confronted and resolved:

## 1. *Expect them*

Remember that marriage is between two human mates, not two perfect mates! One hundred percent compatibility is seldom a reality. Differences are bound to exist. The question is how will those differences be dealt with? A positive approach can foster understanding. A negative one could ensue in conflict. So, don't be surprised when confronted with differences. Instead decide how to face them.

## 2. *Seek to resolve, not win*

Many times conflicts are prolonged because a partner tries to win the argument, instead of resolving it. A killer instinct may be effective in a game of cricket, certainly not in a relationship that is intended to be healthy!

Don't insist on having the last word. Willingness to understand what is causing the conflict and acceptance of one's mistake is vital. The focus should be on resolving; not on emerging superior in the end.

## 3. *Learning to be sacrificial*

A leading cause for differences and consequent conflict is one's unmet expectations. Some expectations may be plainly unrealistic. There



are also instances where expectations could be realistic and yet unable to be met by one's partner.

Learning to be sacrificial in this regard may be vital. Such expectations may have to be modified or sometimes just given up. Insisting that these be met contrary to ground realities may increase the tension and prolong the conflict.

## 4. *Communicate*

Don't resort to mind reading! Don't assume. Don't come to absurd conclusions such as, "he/she does not love me



by  
**Dan  
Zachariah**

anymore." Communicate. Find out. Give the benefit of doubt. Proper communication can help the discovery of causes and differences faster and facilitate resolution and healing quicker. Communication, though usually verbal, may be non-verbal too. Make the process of communication effective by patient listening also.

## 5. *Acceptance*

No matter how difficult or prolonged the process of resolution has been, be willing to accept the other unconditionally. Extend forgiveness and resolve to move on. This is vital for the future health of the relationship.

Allowing past hurts to fester in the mind will lead to resentment and bitterness towards the other partner. Remember it's human to err. End the conflict with an act of forgiveness and go to enjoy the company of the other by choosing to accept him or her, no matter what the faults.

## 6. *Professional counsel*

Marriage does not have to be a gamble. Every marriage can experience relative happiness when there is a genuine desire to resolve differences. There may be situations when the above points may not help to break the deadlock. In such cases professional counsel is recommended.

In a profound statement in the Bible it says that the husband must love his wife as he love himself, and the wife must respect her husband<sup>1</sup>. Desiring to resolve conflicts is a way to show love and respect to one another. If this kind of love and respect is present then the relationship is bound to succeed. □

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 5:33

### Make Love Not War

Because love makes the world go round, while hate is for squares.  
 Because helping an old man across the road gives more pleasure than jabbing a fellow commuter in the ribs.  
 Because a soft answer turns away wrath, while a stone thrown gets one in return.  
 Because a smile exercises your face, while a frown ages it.  
 Because love makes you sing, while hate leaves you singed.  
 Because love and care can make flowers bloom, while hate leaves behind deserts of destruction.  
 Because birds sing, puppies gambol, cats purr and plants grow when they feel your love.  
 Because as they say, you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.  
 Because love is the common thread that unites all religions, if only you had the eye to see it.  
 Because love came before hate, and Adam and Eve before the serpent.  
 Because love is what you see in the child's first toothless smile, but hate has to be learned.  
 Because history has proved love can outlast war and its evils.  
 Because a child's trusting hand in yours feels so much better than a gun in your pocket.  
 Because love is a many splendoured thing, while hate wears only one colour.  
 Because love weathers all, but hate withers all.  
 Because love is elevating, hate is depressing.  
 Because love gives you energy and light, hate is a dead weight.  
 Because love is the best security, hate is a zero investment.  
 Because even after you've won a fight, it still doesn't feel good.  
 Because hateful people think God is on their side, but loving people always try to be on God's side.  
 Because you sleep easy when you love someone.  
 Because you need something to believe in when all else fails.  
 Because love teaches you more than hate ever could.  
 Because it makes everything worth the while.  
 Because love brings out the best and the worst, while hate only brings out the worst in you.  
 Because love heals the wounds of your soul, giving you a chance at life again.  
 Because love from your dear ones will fill you up with positive optimism, giving you wings to soar.  
 Because love allows you to forgive others and love yourself.  
 Because love, rather than hate, builds bridges, keeping your heart warm on cold nights.  
 Because love is immortal, it will always be in vogue.  
 Because love opens your heart to enjoy the small gestures of concern that comes from friends and family.  
 Because you realize that only love can make friends of old enemies.  
 Because love is about God, hatred has no place in His plan of things for you.

Many people will walk in and out of your life. But only true friends will leave footprints in your heart.

**Author Unknown**

Friends are like money in the bank, longer you keep them, the more they are worth.

**Author Unknown**

Love: A temporary insanity curable by marriage.

**Ambrose Bierce**

Don't argue with an idiot; people watching may not be able to tell the difference.

**Author Unknown**

Have children while your parents are still young enough to take care of them.

**Rita Rudner**

A college student was in a philosophy class which had a discussion about God's existence. The professor presented the following logic:  
 "Has anyone in this class heard God?"  
 Nobody spoke.  
 "Has anyone in this class touched God?"  
 Again, nobody spoke.  
 "Has anyone in this class seen God?"  
 When nobody spoke for the third time, he simply stated,  
 "Then there is no God."  
 One student thought for a second, and then asked for permission to reply.  
 Curious to hear this bold student's response, the professor granted it, and the student stood up and asked the following questions of his classmates:  
 "Has anyone in this class heard our professor's brain?"  
 Silence.  
 "Has anyone in this class touched our professor's brain?"  
 Absolute silence.  
 "Has anyone in this class seen our professor's brain?"  
 When nobody in the class dared to speak, the student concluded,  
 "Then, according to our professor's logic, it must be true that our professor has no brain!"  
 (...The student received an 'A' in the class.)  
 Author Unknown

*When we are reading, we often find something that attracts our interest. It's not earth-shattering, or life-changing, 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.*

# Plastic Jesus in a material world

I'm pretty much a sucker for bookstores, but recently I wanted to run right back out of a Christian one. Oh, there were books, but in one corner sat trinkets galore—crosses, fish brooches and other 'symbols' of the Christian faith. And some plastic 'action figures' of Jesus.

That pile of religious trinkets in the corner reminded me of an incident from when I was working in West

Africa. One of the village leaders in a land filled with Voodoo, when asked if he knew who Jesus was, produced one of those plastic dolls and introduced 'Jesus' as just another of his tribal gods.

At the time, we laughed about it and declared that it was time to bring the real gospel to that village. I think I even wrote a story about the 'plastic Jesus'.

You see, those entrenched in a culture filled with other gods will often just accept Jesus into their pantheon of idols. They never renounce the other gods in their life—they simply believe in one more and carry on as before. Nothing has really changed. It is difficult to show a person they must let go of other gods in their life and allow Jesus in as complete Lord.

Returning to the Western World after seven years overseas, that story isn't so funny anymore. In fact, I am now faced with my own plastic version of Jesus.

Before heading overseas to various God-forsaken places, I was briefed and told what to expect, how to cope and the truth that I would find some images, people and lifestyles upsetting and distressing. In short, I prepared myself for culture shock.

What nobody prepared me for was returning home to reverse culture shock.

Take Christian radio, for example. I tuned in, and after listening to a few

decent songs, I continued to listen to the adverts. As in the bookstore, I wanted to run, except I was stuck in traffic. I endured a little longer, telling myself that I simply wasn't used to commercial Christianity. But everything presented was so cutesy, so 'christianese-like' and so... well... plastic. I felt like the whole station broadcast from its own little Christian bubble. After

by  
**Brenda Plonis**



all, aren't adverts for Christian window-installers a little over the top?

Recently, for one particular project with my job, I researched mega-churches online. After looking through a handful of them, I couldn't take any more of 'Click here to be saved', or 'Missed church this week? Click here to donate your tithe to us'.

Most of the churches I

researched didn't appear to do anything for anyone on the outside. But, oh, come to church every week and you can be involved in this, this and this, but only within the walls of that congregation. You're secure because you're only surrounded by other Christians.

I asked myself, how I would react to this if I wasn't a believer. Would I be attracted to the Christianity that is presented in my culture? I'm not so sure. Somehow it was easier to believe in the Jesus of the Bible when I lived in places where I had to rely on him for everything, not just if I needed new windows installed.

It has become so easy to simply 'add Jesus' to the list of gods we have in our culture. We don't think of them as gods, because after all, we don't have idols adorning our homes, or a shrine to the unknown god in our backyard. Our gods are more subtle. They come in the forms of distractions—busyness, materialism, selfishness, and our own little kingdom-building.

We have often quoted Blaise Pascal in this magazine, and how every person has a 'God-shaped hole' in their lives. The quote, although over 300 years old, is still very valid in today's society. We load up on whatever we think will fill that void: Food, shopping, football, even church—anything really.

Sometimes we might even add Jesus, along with our other material possessions. Rather than being Lord of our life he must take his place on the shelf, competing with the other gods for our attention. Jesus can do nothing more for our soul than money, shopping or football does. After all, what more can you expect from a plastic doll. No wonder we still feel empty! □

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# Rachel's story

We all learn from each other. Sometimes, as a minister, I feel I learn more from those who seek my help than I give to them. This is one such story

"Hello. Can I help you?"

"This is Rachel. I am downtown and have nowhere to stay. I haven't any food or money. My baby needs food and medicine. She won't stop crying. Please, please help me."

I first met Rachel a few months previously. It was a sparkling, clear African morning, and everything seemed right with the world. When I arrived, feeling cheerful and good, at my office, Rachel was there.

"Good morning. What can I do for you?"

"Minister, I know God can help me, and you are from him. You can help me."

She told me her story. She had had a good education, and was from a well-off background. She was 18. When she was 16 she found herself pregnant by a man from a different tribe. Her parents did not want to know. "Give the child to the father and then come back" was how they saw it. Rachel, however, wanted to keep the child. And, in any case, the father didn't care.

What no one knew was that Rachel had been infected with HIV—as had the baby. When

I saw her that day, she had full-blown AIDS, and the baby—a little girl—was in the beginning stages. Rachel had sex only once. It had been without commitment and unprotected. It seemed a textbook case—now she had a child out of wedlock, no money and was dying from AIDS.

by  
**James  
Henderson**

Was I hearing her correctly? Was it true? Was she trying to deceive? It had happened before. In the church, you hear many sob stories that are peppered with lies.

As she spoke, she wept from time to time. She was dressed well, and the baby had clean clothes. I noticed blackish spots on her neck and legs. Kaposi's sarcoma? Some

to my sister in the United States. But now she is too sick and won't survive the journey."

"What can I do?"

"I want you to give me some words of encouragement from God. I feel spiritually low."

What do you say? I wanted to wave a magic wand and heal them instantly. Christ could have stretched

out his hands and touched them, saying "Be healed." We prayed. I prayed that God would relieve their suffering and bring them comfort. I prayed about the hope of the dead and the resurrection, and asked God to fill Rachel with the certainty of that hope. My voice was trembling with emotion, and I was beginning to lose it. I despaired at my inability to change anything for her. When I looked up Rachel was smiling her big, wonderful smile.

"Thank you. I feel better. I know there is a God in heaven, and that he cares. Jesus will look after us. Nothing will move my faith."

How could she say that? This young girl and her baby were dying—how was Jesus looking after them? I felt ashamed. My faith wanes with much lesser hardships. I envied Rachel her faith and the tranquility it brought her.

I never saw her again. Sometimes I would watch for her in the streets. Later one of our church members heard that Rachel and the baby had died. Another victim, and yet, from Rachel's viewpoint, in death, another victory. □



of the spots on her legs were open sores. She wanted food and money for ointment. We gave her those, and then she left, disappearing into the teeming Nairobi crowds.

Some time later, Rachel returned. She was obviously thinner and ill, and the baby looked frail.

"I was hoping to send my baby

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# Jesus is

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet Him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of Him. He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won’t torture me!” For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you evil spirit!”

Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.” And he begged Jesus again and again not

to send them out of the area.

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.” He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two

by  
**Mike Fazell**

thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they

saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.<sup>1</sup>

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with Him. Some people feel sorry for the pigs in this story—a poor, innocent herd of snorting and grunting swine minding their own piggy business on the hillside, and Jesus lets a bunch of evil spirits enter them and run them off a cliff to their deaths in the sea.



# coming

I don't feel sorry for the pigs. I didn't feel sorry for the halibut I ate for dinner last night either. That halibut sacrificed its life so that I could have some protein. I don't know how many beasts, birds, fish, trees and plants have likewise died so that I, by eating them, wearing them or otherwise using them, might live. The herd of pigs that night on the shore of the Sea of Galilee died instead of the child of God whom Jesus traveled across the dark and stormy water to save.

## No match for Jesus

The man's demons, so powerful he describes them in terms of a Roman legion of 6,000 warriors, made the man torture himself.<sup>2</sup> They caused him to be ostracised and chained.<sup>3</sup> They caused him unrelenting anguish and misery; but they could not destroy him.

Evil spirits these were, hateful and cruel, bent on destruction of whatever they possessed. The instant they entered the pigs, these demons destroyed them. But they could not destroy the one man they possessed.

Under the old covenant, the one Hebrews 10 says was fulfilled in Christ, pigs were ritually unclean, and as such were not even to be touched, much less eaten, by children of the covenant. Jesus, in effect, "sacrificed" a whole herd of swine for the sake of this one tormented man living among the

tombs. To Jesus, the deliverance and restoration of one human being is worth whatever sacrifice it takes, even Jesus' own torture and death on a wood cross at Golgotha.

How long had this man lived in the graveyard under the unforgiving power of this legion of demons? We aren't told. But we do know this: Jesus was coming. In Mark's story, the only reason Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee that evening—bringing the disciples through a storm they feared would kill them all, but which

in the hand of the man who calmed the waters... " Maybe that's what the Gerasene demoniac wanted to do when he ran to Jesus after seeing Him from afar<sup>4</sup>. But all he could do was fall on his knees and let the demons do the talking.<sup>5</sup> It didn't matter. Jesus came to save him, regardless of the odds, regardless of the depth of the pit the man was in, regardless of the man's inability, because of the demons, to ask Jesus to save him.

Jesus freed him and banned his demons forever by way of the pigs drowned in the sea, symbols of the



uncleanness and the end of the demons, as well as of the personal sacrifice of Jesus, who took the uncleanness of the world upon Himself and cleaned it—that you and I might live free in Him.

It has been said that most people have a hard time relating to the story of the Gerasene demoniac, but that

Jesus calmed with a word—was to deliver that poor man from his bondage.

## Jesus is coming

What are your demons? What has you in self-destructive bondage? Know this: whatever your devils may be, they do not have the power to finally destroy you. Jesus is coming, He's coming for you, to set you free. Not even death can stop Him—His or yours; He conquered death itself. He can free you from anything.

The song says, "Put your hand

drug addicts relate to it easily. That makes sense. I think that anyone who takes sin seriously, like Jesus does, relates easily to this story. Like the demoniac, howling away in the dark from the tombs, even when our sinfulness darkens our hearts, somewhere deep inside we know our need, and we know Jesus is the one who has come to set us free. □

<sup>1</sup> Mark 4:35–41

<sup>2</sup> Mark 5:5

<sup>3</sup> Mark 5:3–4

<sup>4</sup> Mark 5:6

<sup>5</sup> Mark 5:7



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