

# THE Plain Truth

PP 12578/3/2008

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Apr-Jun 2007

**Here he comes,  
ready or not**  
p.10

**Behind every  
successful woman**  
p.5

**Living a short-changed life**  
p.12

THE PLAIN TRUTH

ISSN 1675-3100



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# Don't let moods ruin your day

The minute Mei Lin opened her eyes and reached for the alarm clock, she knew it was going to be one of those days. It wasn't that she had not studied for a test today (she had), or that she'd disappointed her team in the game last night (she hadn't). It was just that, for no good reason she could think of, she didn't want to face the world today.

Later, after having snapped at a good friend, broken a dish accidentally and ignored her little sister, Mei Lin sat down to think about her moderately miserable day. It had fulfilled all her expectations. But why?

*Moods: What causes them, and how and when should we do something about them?* A mood is simply a state of mind—the way we feel over a period of time. Thoughtful, frustrated, lethargic, playful, carefree, cheery—these feelings may last from a few minutes to a few months. In most people, however, moods usually pass after a few hours or days at longest.

Moods add variety to our personalities and our lives. Often, the low spells help us to enjoy and appreciate the highs more.

'Moody' Mei Lin might feel on top of the world one morning, tired and a little depressed by mid afternoon and content again by evening. 'Stable' Ai Ling, on the other hand, never seems to get depressed, but she may rarely experience the bubbly ecstasy Mei Lin feels on her best days. Occasionally, however, Mei Lin, Ai Ling and the rest of us hit a blue phase that just won't quit. We can't seem to get ourselves over a feeling of disappointment, anger or self-pity. When this happens to you, here are a few helpful ideas to remember.

*It won't last forever.* A swift slide from the peaks of prowess to somewhere below sea level may leave you confused and a little frightened. Although it's hard to believe when you're down, you know you are making progress when you can say to yourself, "I've felt this way before, and it has always gone away.

This too will pass."

*Look for a cause.* During the teen years, many mood changes can be caused by changes within your body. You don't have much control over these mood-movers, but it's comforting to at least understand what's happening. Your health is a factor you can control. Though we may not like to admit it, the way we treat our bodies can powerfully influence the way we think. Lack of exercise, for example, can contribute to feelings of anger and frustration because of excess energy. Fatigue makes the world look gray to the most optimistic person. An inadequate diet or imbibing drugs, alcohol or certain foods can drag us down in an amazingly short time. If you suspect that one of these factors may be adversely affecting your moods, try keeping a log of your daily moods along with your sleep, exercise and diet. Sometimes an external factor is a cause of a mood, of course—you're grieved at, a loss, you're disappointed in yourself or you're worried or afraid of something very real. Sometimes life is so complicated, it's impossible to pinpoint the problem. Still, thinking it through may help you sort things out.

Try to imagine what change in your life would make you feel better. Discovering the problem may not send you running through the streets shouting "Eureka", but it may start you toward a long-range solution.

*Do something productive.* Moodiness somehow tries to convince us that sitting and feeling sorry for ourselves is the most enjoyable way to spend our time. Don't believe it. One of the most effective ways to beat the blues is to get our minds off ourselves and onto somebody or something else. Get absorbed in a good book. Volunteer to fix dinner or do a good deed for someone in need. The one activity to avoid, though (and this goes for the exceptionally good moods as well as bad ones),

is making decisions that affect your future. If you quit when you're low, you may regret it. When the mood has leveled out, you'll still remember how you felt, but you'll be able to make a more rational decision which you will be able to live with.

*Talk to somebody.* Having a friend around helps fight the loneliness that comes along with bad moods. And sometimes just explaining our feelings to our parents or to a close friend can go a long way toward relieving and controlling these moods.

*Take your problem and frustration to God.* Which of your friends can help you the most if you go to Him first? Many have found that asking God to help them through a rainy day works wonders. God, after all, is the One who gave us the capacity to have moods, feelings and emotions in the first place. Elijah, Moses, even David, a man after God's own heart<sup>1</sup>, had their good days and their bad days. Reading through a few of the Psalms will convince you that David had as many intense highs and lows as any teen today.

When you feel you're having one of those days or sense a mood coming on, why not do what David wrote in the book of Psalm? "Why are cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God."<sup>2</sup>

David discovered a key to overcoming bad moods through talking and praise to God. The biblical solution to depression and bad moods is as current as today's newspaper. Try it and you'll see. The Bible declares that "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."<sup>3</sup> Read some of David's psalms daily. I think you will find them helpful in surviving the moods that hinder us. David survived his moods and made the best of them, trusting in God for help. You can survive them, too, and enjoy them as the natural part of living that they are. □

<sup>1</sup> Acts 13:22

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 43:5

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 46:1

# THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding



8



6



22



5



16

Issue No. 1	Volume No. 6
April-June 2007	PP 12578/3/2008
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The Plain Truth is published five times a year as funds allow, and is sponsored by the Worldwide Church of God Malaysia, which is a member of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Malaysia. It follows a non-denominational editorial policy and provides a message of practical help, hope and encouragement from a Christian perspective.

- For Non-Muslims Only -

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

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

ISSN 1675-3100. Copyright Worldwide Church of God, 2007.

## cover story

**12 Living a short-changed life**  
Living an abundant life through Christ.

## articles

**5 Behind every successful woman**  
Proverbs 31 husband?

**6 Encountering mental depression**  
Our writer's accounts his experience.

**8 If Jesus were married**  
Loving your spouse.

**10 Here He comes, ready or not**  
Is Jesus returning as prophesied?

**15 Let God be God**  
Salvation depends on God.

**16 Mental health interview**  
An interview with a psychiatrist.

**20 What on earth is God doing?**  
Transferring humanity into God's image.

**22 The New Covenant is older than you think**  
How old is the New Covenant?.

## regular features

**2 Editorial**

**4 What our readers say**

**19 Hmm...**  
Something to think about.

# What our readers say:

My family and I thank you and your co-workers for supplying us with this wonderful magazine which inspires us in many ways. May the blessed hands of God be with you in all your daily undertakings.

**Subramaniam Paul**  
**Seremban**

I have read THE PLAIN TRUTH which was lent to me by my neighbour and I like its contents. Besides, I want to improve my understanding of Christianity.

**R. Sudiah**  
**Kota Marudu**

The articles are so inspiring that they give me a much needed uplift when I am feeling down. May God Almighty bless THE PLAIN TRUTH and all those who serve and contribute to the publication of this magazine!

**Geh Cheng Lok**  
**Penang**

I have always enjoyed reading your refreshing articles which I often use for revision in my Bible class. You present a different perspective of this challenging world by offering age-old solutions from the Bible. Thank you for a very good work done. Do continue with your effort and we pray the good Lord will guide and sustain you always.

**Peter Wang**  
**Kuala Lumpur**

I refer to the above magazine which I have been receiving for the past few months. I would like to say that it is a great magazine and that it has imparted spiritual understanding and knowledge to many non-Christian readers. I have also benefited from it greatly. However, owing to the limited time I have now, and the availability of many missionary books and biblical commentaries, I would like to request that the sending of the magazine to me be stopped so that the magazine may be given to others who have not heard of Jesus Christ and the love of God. Thank you again for the wonderful magazine and may God bless you for



your great effort in spreading the good news to all humanity!

**Gilbert Seow**  
**Singapore**

THE PLAIN TRUTH articles are interesting and enlightening. They make me think. I share the magazine with my friends.

**Selvaraju Chidabaram**  
**Klang**

THE PLAIN TRUTH is enlightening and the interpretation of issues and past events are interesting.

**Fong Soo Har**  
**Kuala Lumpur**

THE PLAIN TRUTH carries life stories and good articles.

**Stanley Tan**  
**Petaling Jaya**

There are lots of interesting Christian stories and it is very exciting to read these stories.

**Julia Fred**  
**Kuala Lumpur**

The articles are thought-provoking, helpful, relevant... and more importantly, biblical.

**Gan Tian Eng**  
**Klang**

The articles are enlightening with lots of wisdom to help us cope with the many challenges and corruption in our daily life.

**Patrick Foo**  
**Petaling Jaya**

The articles, which are neither parochial nor orthodox, are relevant to our modern society. Keep up the good work. May God bless all of you who are involved in publishing THE PLAIN TRUTH.

**E. S. Lee**  
**Petaling Jaya**

The articles stimulate our thinking on contemporary issues. Right thinking in turn will result in right living.

**Lim Poh Ann**  
**Petaling Jaya**

THE PLAIN TRUTH guides me to find my direction in life.

**Yap Yin Chong**  
**Johor Bahru**

THE PLAIN TRUTH gives spiritual guidance as well as practical advice to the readers. My late parents embraced Christianity at very old age after their retirement from government service. They had peace of mind until their departure from this world.

**Quah Steven**  
**Kuala Lumpur**

The articles are simply great, informative and encouraging.

**Choong Yew Min**  
**Klang**

The informative and uplifting articles strengthen my faith and give me courage.

**Evalin Teh**  
**Petaling Jaya**

THE PLAIN TRUTH gives me a better understanding of the events happening around the world. It also gives balanced comments on topics currently happening here in Singapore and in the other countries.

**Reylito Mateo**  
**Singapore**

*Although THE PLAIN TRUTH is sent free of charge, it is not without cost. Each copy is made possible by the generosity of others. So we are very grateful for those readers who send a donation, and make it possible for us to continue to publish the good news of the Gospel.*



# Behind every successful woman

Behind every successful man, the saying goes, there is a good woman. But have you ever considered that behind many a successful woman, there is a good man?

Was Proverbs 31 ever intended to be an idealistic standard for women to attain by themselves? Not at all! Instead, this passage of Scripture, like the rest of Proverbs, was written originally as a challenge to men. It is all too easy for guys to read Proverbs 31: 10–31 rather flippantly—“Wow, if only I had a wife like this!”—without stopping to notice what these verses say about this woman’s rather remarkable husband.

First, the good husband recognises the true value of his wife as a person.<sup>1</sup> He sees her as God’s priceless, one-of-a-kind masterpiece. He knows she is “worth far more than rubies.” The world says you are worth something only if you are beautiful, intelligent or athletic. But that is not God’s measure of true value. Self-worth is not based on what I do, but who I am—a person created in the image of God.

A man beautifies his wife by cherishing her for what she is. He does not let his wife lose her sense of being special once the honeymoon is over. He continues to court her. The good husband also believes in the potential of his wife.<sup>2</sup> He does not put her in a box called home only to let her lie there, dormant. Instead, he allows her to be productive and fulfilled both in and out of the home.

Frankly, the good husband of Proverbs 31 amazes me. How many husbands are willing to let their wives make real estate investments and start business ventures on their own?<sup>3</sup> Or let

their wives make contributions to charitable organisations as they see fit?<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, in our society, the husband has been viewed as solely responsible for the family income and budget. The wife has been left out of these matters.

by  
**David  
Stanford**

achieve and succeed. The good husband is mature enough to encourage and support his wife to reach her full potential. He believes in her and provides an atmosphere in which she is free to succeed. He does not let his ego get in her way.

The good husband will wisely listen to (and learn from) the wisdom of his wife.<sup>6</sup> He may be spared from many rash and foolish actions by respecting that “faithful instruction is on her tongue”. My wife has taught me much about God and about life. I enjoy listening to her. No, I have not relinquished my responsibility as the spiritual leader in our home. But we enjoy challenging one another spiritually and intellectually. No day is complete unless we have an opportunity to share new insights with each other. I am never the loser when I give my wife my undivided attention.

Why are so many couples failing in their marriages? Howard Hendricks suggests this answer: “They have taken no time to cultivate their own relationship, listen to each other and develop common interests.” The good husband strengthens his marriage by taking time to listen to his wife. He respects her opinions and heeds her advice.

Finally, the good husband praises the virtues and accomplishments of his wife.<sup>7</sup> He does not flatter her but praises her fear of God<sup>8</sup> and successful endeavours.<sup>9</sup> A husband can make a tremendous impact on his

wife by consciously and consistently looking for opportunities to praise her. □

*This article was written for Focus on the Family Malaysia and appeared in the “Asian Beacon” magazine Dec.’05-’06 issue.*



But the good husband challenges these cultural myths. The biblical concept of submission has in it the idea of assuming a supportive role. Both men and women are called to submit to one another.<sup>5</sup> The good husband actively supports his wife as she seeks to reach her full potential.

The mark of marital maturity is the ability to help your spouse

<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 31:10

<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 31:11

<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 31:16

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 31:20

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 5:21

<sup>6</sup> Proverbs 31:26

<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 31:28

<sup>8</sup> Proverbs 31:30

<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 31:31

# Encountering me

Lying on my back for two days in the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit (CICU) was not the kind of ‘rest’ I had ever foreseen. I had a heart attack about a year ago, and was fortunate in that my friends brought me to the hospital in time.

## Disappointment

Although there were two to three nurses in the CICU stationed only a few feet away from me at all times, I had never felt more alone in my life. I

by  
**Ben David**

disappointed with God for not preventing the heart attack, for not giving me early warning signals, and generally for not ‘shielding’ me from this attack. But I became more disappointed with myself. I had failed to see the dangers of having high cholesterol levels, possible high blood pressure, a stressful lifestyle and a lack of exercise. I had certainly seemed to have forgotten that my father had died of a heart attack in his

mind I knew Satan was deceptive, and should not let him deceive me. The conflicting thoughts that I had are not necessarily true, but my mind kept playing tricks on me.

I was so low in spirit that I failed to see the blessings of God. For instance, it could have been worse. I had survived a heart attack. I still had supportive family and friends. I was fortunate to have continued in my job. At that time I was unable to see that God was still actively



thought maybe God didn't care. I was afraid I might die in the CICU, or later in the hospital ward, without ever seeing my family again. Thoughts of a second or third heart attack also surfaced. The fear of pain, imminent death and suffering from a critical disease gripped me and sent me into a tailspin. Within five days I was at home, tired and despondent. I felt very weak, even to talk.

I became confused as to why God let this happen to me. I was

early sixties, while my mother had suffered a mild heart attack in her early fifties. The signs were there, but I had not been mindful of them.

## The blessings of God

The Bible says that our Creator God knows each one of us<sup>1</sup> and is capable of saving us from trouble. But I felt Satan was now sneering that God doesn't really care. And that God is more interested in 'sin' than in saving. At the back of my

involved in my life.

About a month after the heart attack, I was back at work. The amount of work was daunting—having to catch up with my work and getting students ready for exams. During that time, the company also shifted to new premises. The centralised air-conditioning and the carpeting somehow worked up a persistent cough in me.

Almost nine months into my

# mental depression

heart attack, I was served with a retirement notice (the company was on a 'right-sizing' exercise). All these while, the coughing got worse.

The heart attack and subsequent surgery, the heavy workload, retirement, financial concerns, worsening cough, dramatic life changes and related stress all helped to propel me into severe depression.

I am learning to cope and fight this depression. It is not easy, but taking life one day at a time makes it more bearable.

## Seeking support

During my period of depression, I tended to isolate myself. The pitfall of isolation was that it intensified my sadness and deepened my grief. It is natural to grieve, and we ought to allow ourselves time to express that grief. Yet it is crucial that we don't stay too long in the dark demoralising pits. Seek out the support of caring family and good friends who sympathise and empathise with what we are going through.

If we are living alone, it might be good to put some effort to seek the counsel of pastors or professional help. Or join relevant support groups to share similar problems and work together to help each other, and have fellowship. A shared burden is lighter and more bearable.<sup>2</sup>

## Awareness

Prolonged grief with no solution in sight affects the quality of life of the sufferer. We need to be aware and recognise the symptoms of depression, for example, being disheartened, distrustful, anxious about the future, and continuous worrying. There are biological (disturbances in the brain's neurochemistry) and psychological changes (affecting moods, behaviour and thinking) in a depressed person. Victims of prolonged and severe depression may also be prone to other

illnesses, including thoughts of suicide or self-harm.

We therefore need to be concerned of our mental health or lack of it and seek pastoral or professional medical care and treatment promptly. They help to increase our understanding of our situation, and to find effective long-term solutions to reduce future episodes of depression. We can then play an active role in managing our own mental health. A sense of feeling that we are in control of our lives and depression, rather than vice versa is very helpful for battling depression.

## Prayer and meditation

Believing in a Creator God is a good starting point. I know God has plans for me, to give me hope and a future and is not out to harm me<sup>3</sup>. Philippians 4:4–9 encourages me not to be anxious about anything but with thanksgiving, to bring all my requests to God and to meditate on whatever is true, right and pure. Thanksgiving can work as an antidote to depression when we discover how much God is concerned about our wellbeing and our 'eternal future'. I can give thanks with joy to learn how God, with the blood of Jesus, has rescued me and others from Satan, and brought us into His Kingdom<sup>4</sup>.

A life of scheduled prayer works as a form of spiritual therapy. As I prayed about my situation, my anxieties were replaced by God's peace. Knowing that I can only do so much, and at the same time placing the impossibilities into His divine possibilities, is a real 'rest' for me. It's what some describe as experiencing a "peaceful anxiety".

## The Holy Spirit

Through the indwelling power of God's Holy Spirit<sup>5</sup>, we can build a relationship with God that becomes the foundation for learning to overcome depression<sup>6</sup>. We can ask His Spirit to lead us and fill our minds with the truth in the Bible. Scriptural truth

becomes our primary line of defence to combat distracting thoughts that bring us down to the pits<sup>7</sup>. The Spirit of Christ empowers us with His 'sound' mind—overcoming doubts and lack of faith which have so easily sidetracked us from God's true purposes<sup>8</sup>. Also through His Spirit as the Comforter, God is able to comfort us in trying times and to strengthen us through self-restraint. We can then channel our thoughts to please Him. Knowing that He is in control of all situations provides us with impetus to defeat depression.

## Centre on God

When we begin to focus on God, and His will for us, we would be spending more time thinking His thoughts and not be troubled by earthly concerns. We will be convicted that all our earthly pain and troubles, including suffering and fighting severe mental depression, are not worthy of comparison with what God has in store for us for eternity<sup>9</sup>. If we can centre our hearts and minds on loving God, we can begin to believe that all things work together for good<sup>10</sup>. For whatever illness and challenges we go through, He uses them to give us maturity, inner strength and stability.

## Coming to terms

It may take time to work through depression. But being aware and accepting the reality of the situation is an important step. We should not continue denying the facts. It is a challenge to accept some realities of life, for example, the loss of good health and financial support, and a change in lifestyle. But the sooner we come to terms with our situation, the closer we are to resolving our depression. Knowing that somehow life has to move on, we are able to embark on a more hopeful and constructive way of life. Seeking out close friends and professional help is crucial to the healing process. And, above all, it is never too late to humbly approach our Maker, the great Physician who heals. □

<sup>1</sup> John 10:3

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 6:2–10

<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 29:11–13

<sup>4</sup> Colossians 1:11–14

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 5:18

<sup>6</sup> Romans 8:6

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:3–5

<sup>8</sup> 2 Timothy 1:6–7

<sup>9</sup> Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17–18

<sup>10</sup> Romans 8:28



# If Jesus we

Jesus was not married. But let's suppose for a minute what some people seem to *think* He would have done.

- *Jesus would inspire total confidence.* Oops. One disciple betrayed Him, and the others ran off. Only the women were faithful.
- *Jesus would do all the talking.* Wrong again—Jesus wants His wife (the church) to talk. She makes a few mistakes, of course, but that's the way we all learn. Both men and women are inspired to speak.
- *Jesus would watch television while His wife served Him snacks.* Silly, isn't it? The truth is, Jesus would serve His wife when she was watching television. He knew He was going to die the next day, and yet He washed the disciples' feet while they argued with each other.
- *Jesus would be so dominant that His wife would never be seen.* False. Jesus wants His church to be seen. He exercises His dominance by encouraging His wife to go into the world to work.
- *Jesus would manage His children well.* Jesus is not the problem—we are. Yet often we expect marriages within the church to be even better than what Jesus has! How ironic! Do we think we deserve more than He does?

We have various myths about marriage that are a little laughable, but when we try to live a myth, we cause a lot of pain. Husbands cause pain, and wives cause pain. We are both shot through with sin, and sin hurts people.

## Singles

Some people are better off single, and some people are better off married. God created men and women for marriage, but He gave some people the gift of single.<sup>1</sup>

We need to value our singles and appreciate them the way they are. When we talk about marriage, we do not want to slight the unmarried. It is a perfectly honourable state. Some do not use it honourably—just



by  
**Joseph Tkach**

as some married people do not handle marriage responsibly, either. No matter what state we are in, we are called to serve.

A single person, Paul said, can be totally dedicated to God. A married person has divided interests.<sup>2</sup> Single men and women can be enormous agents for the kingdom of God. Jesus was single, and Paul was single. Lydia and Phoebe probably were, too.

## Your body is not your own

Paul discusses the responsibilities married people have for each other: "The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife."<sup>3</sup>

Neither husbands nor wives can make selfish decisions. The husband cannot just decide to go off on his own some evening without letting his wife know where he is, because his body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife. She has a right to know. This verse prohibits unilateral decisions even for spiritually worthy causes; it is true for carnal pursuits as well, and the principle is as true for wives as it is for husbands.

The focus is on self-control, not other control. We can't demand our rights from our spouse. We can't demand to control their bodies. Even if that is our right, we cannot live the way of demand. What we can do is to control our own body in the way that honours the spouse. We work on ourselves rather than ordering others around. We try to please, not to demand.

Let this mind be in you, Paul wrote.<sup>4</sup> Think like Jesus did. Though He had great power, He did not use it for His own advantage. He took on the nature of a servant, He humbled Himself to serve His wife. God does not measure greatness the way we do. He does not look at leadership the way we often do. Jesus did not demand His rights. He just did the job that He was given to do.

Paul later gave some instructions to husbands and wives. He told wives to submit.<sup>5</sup> He told husbands to give themselves to their wives in service.<sup>6</sup> Some husbands claim to be willing to die for their wives, but are actually unwilling to change a diaper. I have a simple instruction for such husbands: Die daily. Because if you aren't willing to serve, you stink worse than a diaper.

Paul told husbands to love and care for their wives; he did not tell the husbands to demand submission. He told wives to submit, not to demand more love or more sacrifices. Each of us must attend to our own responsibilities whether or not the other person does.<sup>7</sup> We have to concentrate on what we can do, not on what the other person isn't doing.

## Do you deserve a break today?

If we got what we deserve, we'd be dead. All of us, through God's grace, have more than we deserve. In Jesus, we have been given eternal life, something we did not earn and something we could never earn. If our sins were counted against us, we'd deserve punishment every day, but we get blessings instead. We don't deserve a break today, but God gives us one anyway.

Every day, we need to be thankful for the blessings we have—always better than we deserve. When we see our spouse, always remember, this is better than I deserve. Always be thankful.

Remember the million-dollar debt God has forgiven you. Be forgiving when your spouse slips up.<sup>8</sup> Forgive each other from the heart, and do it fast. This is where the gospel of salvation by grace has an incredibly practical application in our day-to-day lives. It calls us to be gracious toward our spouses. It calls us to make sacrifices.

Husbands, love your wives even if you have to get down on your knees and wash their feet. Or stand up and wash the dishes. Honour



# re married

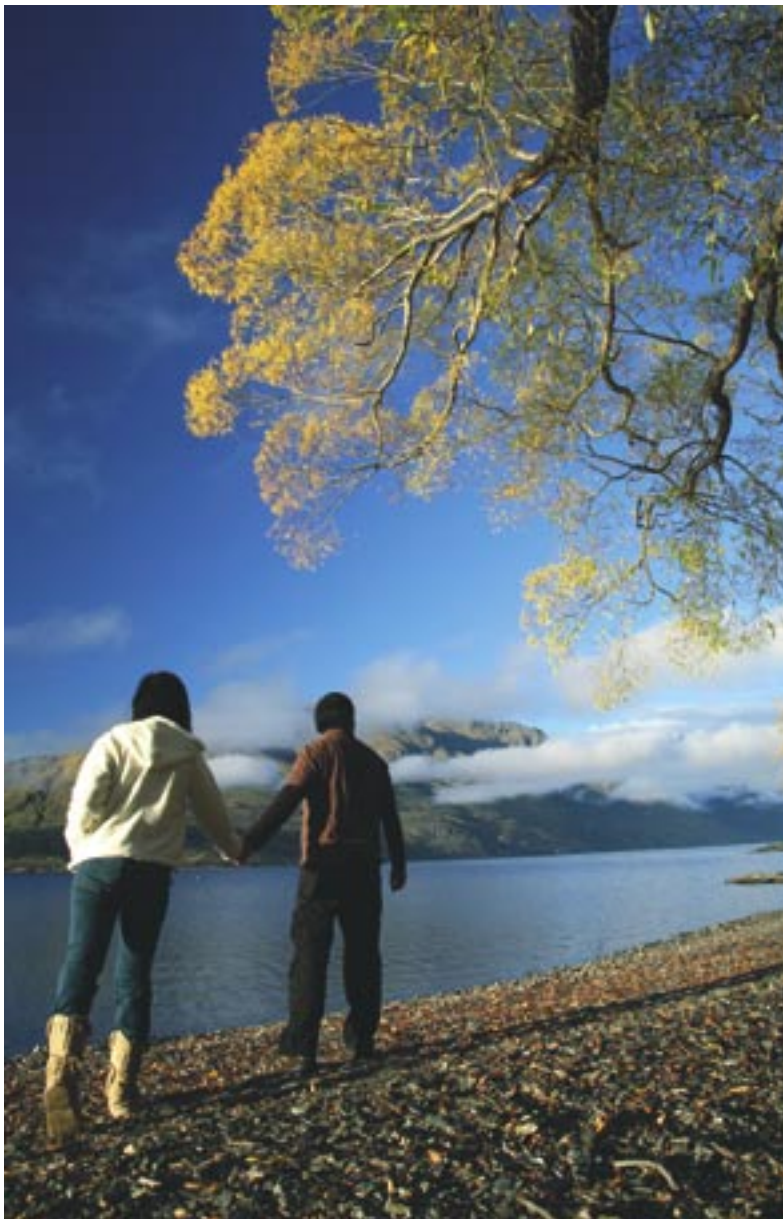
them, respect them. Do not belittle them, for they are heirs with you of eternal life.

## Service

Peter calls us to humility and self-sacrifice: “Submit yourselves for

you bad-mouth your employer at home, don’t be surprised if your family has trouble respecting you.

“To this you were called,” Peter writes, “because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow His steps.”<sup>11</sup> Yes,



the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men.”<sup>9</sup> If you don’t keep the laws of the land with integrity, don’t be surprised if your family has trouble obeying you. “Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect.”<sup>10</sup> If

we follow Him into suffering, into sacrificing our pride. If we have trouble obeying Him, and we all do, then it should be no surprise that people have trouble doing what we want.

Peter has similar instructions

for wives: “Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands.”<sup>12</sup> And he has similar instructions for husbands: “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives ...so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”<sup>13</sup> If you don’t treat your wife right, how can you expect God to listen to you? Be considerate—that means to consider her needs before your own. That is what love means.

Ephesians 5:21 says that we are to submit to one another. We do not do this in exactly the same way (parents submit to their children in a different way than children submit to their parents), but we must all submit to one another’s needs. We need to consider our spouses better than ourselves, better than we deserve.<sup>14</sup> Husbands, lead by example, not by demanding submission.

Husbands are called to love their wives. This means that they should be patient with them, kind with them. They do not envy or brag. They are not proud, rude or self-seeking. They do not get angry easily, nor do they dredge up mistakes of the past. Husbands should always protect, always trust, always be optimistic and never give up.<sup>15</sup>

Christ calls us to self-sacrifice, to be living sacrifices. We give our lives to Him, and we live for Him, and we let Him live in us in our day-to-day relationships.

Good marriages don’t just happen. They take work and conscious effort. When we live with someone every day for years and years, our patience will be tested. Our selfishness will be seen. Our spirituality (or lack of it) will be evident. We will make mistakes, and we will need forgiveness, and we will need to be forgiving.

Let grace abound! Forgive one another, just as Christ forgave you.<sup>16</sup> Be Jesus to your spouse. □

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

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:32–34

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:4

<sup>4</sup> Philippians 2:5–10

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 5:22

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 5:25

<sup>7</sup> A spouse is not required to stay in co-operation with an abusive or life-threatening situation.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 18:23–35

<sup>9</sup> 1 Peter 2:12

<sup>10</sup> 1 Peter 2:18

<sup>11</sup> 1 Peter 2:21

<sup>12</sup> 1 Peter 3:1

<sup>13</sup> 1 Peter 3:7

<sup>14</sup> Philippians 2:3

<sup>15</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:6–8

<sup>16</sup> Colossians 3:13

# Here He come

**D**on't you wish that Jesus would return? That any day now all the wretchedness and wickedness that we see continually around us would end and that God would usher in a time when "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea"?<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament authors lived in expectation of the Second Coming that would deliver them "from the present evil age."<sup>2</sup> They exhorted Christians to prepare themselves spiritually and to be morally alert, knowing very well that "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night,"<sup>3</sup> unexpectedly, without warning beforehand.

When Jesus lived, just like today, people were anxious to know when the end would come so they could get ready for it. Interestingly, Jesus' reply implied that they should stop speculating and always be ready anyway without being prompted by prior indicators.

Look closely at the accounts in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 where Jesus explained to the disciples that the temple would be destroyed (this happened in A.D. 70). What was Jesus really saying? Was He telling us to look for the signs of the times?

"Tell us ...what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age,"<sup>4</sup> the disciples asked Jesus privately. Believers have had the same question ever since. How will we know more or less the hour when our Master comes? We feel a need to know. But Jesus points us to a different need—the need to be ready regardless of history's times and seasons.

The immediate answer Jesus gave conjures up in the biblically literate mind images of the figurative, frightening four horsemen of the Apocalypse<sup>5</sup> that have ignited the imagination of prophetic and fantasy writers for centuries. False religion, war, famine, deadly disease—sounds like our age right here and now? Yes, it does, and it was meant to sound that way. In fact, it was meant to sound like every age.

by  
**James  
Henderson**



# s, ready or not

Some—many if you think about it—have said that what Jesus was saying is that when we see an intensifying of war, famine, and these other things, it means the end is near.

Stimulated by this idea of things getting really bad before Christ returns, fundamentalists have tried, in their zeal for truth, to flesh out what they view as end-time references in prophetic scriptures, especially in the book of Revelation. But what was Jesus saying? He does not discuss the idea of intensification. He seems, rather, to be discussing the constant condition of humankind.

There has been and always will be until He comes again many deceivers who come in Christ's name as well as "wars and rumors of wars ... famines and earthquakes in various places".<sup>6</sup> Has there been, since Christ came, a generation spared from these things? These prophetic words of our Lord find fulfillment in the human record of every age of history.

Yet today, as in the past, people look at world events and some, even some leading Christian opinion makers, claim prophecy is unfolding and the end is near.

Of course, all of us want the end to be near, and we desire our Saviour's return. However, Jesus Himself said, in suggesting our response to what some call the signs of the times: "See to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come."<sup>7</sup>

Regrettably, sensational end-time scenario preaching in public campaigns or through television, radio and magazines is often used in the cause of evangelism to frighten people into believing in Jesus Christ. Shape up or burn up is an option given. If you don't give your life to Jesus, you will be a victim in the violence to come.

We forget how Jesus Himself evangelised—how He brought the good news. He evangelised above

all through kindness and mercy—look at the weight of the examples in the Gospels and see for yourself.

Paul explains it clearly when he says: "Or do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance and patience, not realising that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?"<sup>8</sup> It is God's goodness expressed to others through us that brings people to Jesus. We can be sobered by the concept of divine judgment, but we should not evangelise through threats of apocalyptic retribution.

Jesus pointed to the need to make sure we are spiritually ready for His return whenever it will be. That was His emphasis. That is more important than trying to

*"no one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."*

establish something beyond the scope of human knowledge—"no one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."<sup>9</sup> Being better informed than the angels instead of being better prepared for His coming is where some of us focus. Jesus concentrated on our being prepared.

In reinforcing this point to His disciples Jesus used various illustrations and analogies. For example, "as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."<sup>10</sup> At the time of Noah there were no signs of imminent disaster. No discussion of wars and rumours of wars and famine and disease. No threatening clouds on the horizon, just sudden rain.

Relatively peaceful prosperity and moral depravity appeared to have gone hand-in-hand. They "knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."<sup>11</sup>

What should we learn from the reference to Noah? To look at the weather patterns and watch for the telltale signs that may inform us of a date that the angels are ignorant of? No, it rather reminds us to "be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap."<sup>12</sup>

Jesus also presented the parable of the 10 virgins to hammer this idea home. I understand this more since I moved to Africa. Some years ago I was to perform a wedding at noon and come 3 p.m. the bride, not the bridegroom, had not arrived—she had delayed her coming!

Some of the attendants—not the bridesmaids as implied in the parable—fell asleep while waiting. At one point I noticed the bridegroom himself beginning to nod off.

What was the message of Jesus' story? Lest you fall asleep, have your lamps filled with oil so that your light can shine. Use the Holy Spirit. Be generous, welcome the stranger, visit the sick, be Jesus in your community.<sup>13</sup> If we do so, that is like giving people food in due season, when they need it. "It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns."<sup>14</sup>

We know that in faith Christ lives in us,<sup>15</sup> that His kingdom has begun in us and in His church, that there is a gospel work to be done now wherever we live, and that "in this hope we are saved"<sup>16</sup> upon the return of our Lord.

"The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise."<sup>17</sup> "So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him."<sup>18</sup> □

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 11:9

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 1:4

<sup>3</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:2

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 24:30

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 6:1–8

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 24:5–7

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 24:6

<sup>8</sup> Romans 2:4

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 24:36

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 24:37

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 24:39

<sup>12</sup> Luke 21:34

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 25:31–46

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 24:46

<sup>15</sup> Galatians 2:20

<sup>16</sup> Romans 8:24

<sup>17</sup> 2 Peter 3:9

<sup>18</sup> 2 Peter 3:14



# Living a short

I was taking a flight to Penang to attend a conference, so I called a taxi to take me to the airport. The fare came to RM67. I gave the taxi driver a RM100 note and he gave me back RM23 (RM10 short) with a smile! He was trying to short-change me! I counted the balance twice and seeing that I wasn't happy, he gave me back the RM10. With a deceptive look on his face, he apologised

Even if I was short-changed, I wouldn't be terribly upset because the amount involved was so small—perhaps just enough to buy a light meal at the airport restaurant.

We often read in the newspapers about cases where people have lost substantial sums of money (even jewellery) to conmen who prowl and pounce on the naïve and the unsuspecting. We need to be extra careful so that we don't get short-changed!

## Short-changed lives

More than money, we could short-change our lives. Instead of living happy, abundant lives, we could be conned into living confused, unhappy and frustrated lives. This can happen when we fail to build good relationships with our loved ones, the people around us and with God.

Many married couples today live short-changed lives because they don't give their all to each other. They don't respect and appreciate each other or help each other develop into a mature, "value-added" person. They sow less and therefore reap less.<sup>1</sup> The result is: each has less to give to the other while each expects more from the other. This often leads to arguments, quarrels and strained relationships in their marriage. Both end up being unhappy. Sadly, some marriages also end up in divorce.

Parents and children too can short-change their lives. When parents spend *all* their time and energy doing business and making money, they have little time to give to their children. They don't make time to develop healthy relationships



by  
**Dr. P.  
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with their children. They sow little but expect much from their children (e.g., good grades or good behaviour). Some children don't perform well due to parental neglect, it is not because they are not intelligent. Parents too often

themselves and influenced by their peers, many end up in unhealthy activities such as doing drugs, sex or joining street gangs. The end result is: the children suffer and this brings heartache to parents. Thus parents and children live



don't spend time helping, guiding and encouraging their children. Some parents are absentee parents; they don't get to see their children and their children don't get to see them. So the children look to their peers for support. Left to

short-changed lives.

We also short-change our relationships with other people such as those at school, work, church or neighbourhood. This can also include those we meet in our daily lives such as those at the

# Short-changed life

supermarket, restaurant, post office or on the street. We don't wish them well or say thank you; we don't practise common courtesy; and we don't give a helping hand to someone in need. And we get the same thing in return. We

but we also short-change our relationship with God who is our Provider, Sustainer and Source of every blessing. God loved us so much that He gave His son Jesus Christ so that we might be saved from sin and death. Jesus came as

don't appreciate or reciprocate His love. God is stretching out His hand to us, but some are not making any effort to reach out to Him. When we short-change our relationship with God, we short-change our lives. As a result, we live confused, unhappy and frustrated lives—all because we cut ourselves off from God and His revealed knowledge of who we are, why we are here, and how we ought to live. Thus we sow little and reap little.

We can also short-change our rewards at our workplace. Employees and employers can short-change each other. Employees give less of their time and energy to their employers and they, in turn, give them less. Thus each sows less and reaps less and both end up being unhappy.

We all want to live happy, abundant lives and we don't want anyone to short-change our life. To do that, we must identify all those who might short-change us.

So who are these short-changers? Let's look into God's word—the Bible—to identify who these culprits might be.

## **The short-changers**

The Bible positively identifies the short-changers who cause us to live unhappy and miserable lives. They are none other than the Devil (or Satan), the world (or society) and ourselves (or self). We can label them SSS—for Satan, society and self.

## **Satan**

People generally dismiss Satan and his demons as myth, maybe because they are invisible. The Bible, however, clearly tells us that there is a spirit world and there are evil spirits who prowl and pounce on the unsuspecting. Their goal is to deceive and destroy humanity which has the potential to become children of God. That's why Satan is angry with all those who would seek to obey God. That's also the reason why God asks us to be vigilant. He wants us to resist Satan (with *His* power, the Holy Spirit) as the following scriptures tell us:

fail to build strong and lasting relationships with people. So we end up being loners. We sow little and reap little. Thus we short-change our lives.

Not only do we short-change our relationships with one another,

a human being, lived among us, cared for the people, healed the sick and brought hope to a lost humanity. He loved us so much that He was willing to exchange death with us so that we might live with Him forever. Sadly, some



“We know that we are children of God, and that the *whole world* is under the control of the evil one.”<sup>2</sup>

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...”<sup>3</sup>

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.”<sup>4</sup>

When God created Adam and Eve, He said it was “very good.”<sup>5</sup> He gave them simple, clear instructions so that they could obey and live happy, abundant lives. But Satan appeared and lied to them. He effectively told them that they could have good lives without God and without His revealed knowledge. In short, he told them that they could sin and still have a good life. Adam and Eve swallowed Satan’s lie wholesale. They disobeyed God and thus rejected the Tree of Life—which represents the abundant life that God was offering them. They rejected God and settled for unhappy, painful and frustrated lives.

Satan hijacked God’s offer to Adam and Eve. He deceived them and all humanity descended from them into accepting a short-changed life. That’s why human lives are full of unhappiness, suffering and frustration. You can read the full story in the very first book of the Bible—Genesis, chapter 3.

Jesus warned His followers to be vigilant and resist Satan who could deceive and hijack the abundant life that God was offering them (and us today). He told them: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”<sup>6</sup> Again he wrote: “...the devil ...was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”<sup>7</sup> Jesus warned His followers not to give in to his temptations and deceptions.

Some of Jesus’ followers believed His message and started to live the abundant life while others, like Adam and Eve, dismissed His message and continued to live the confused, painful and frustrated life. They preferred to live a short-changed life, like many today!

### **Society**

The society around us can also short-change our lives. It can drag us

down if we give in to its glitter. The world measures success in terms of power, fame, riches and pleasure, but God measures success differently. If we are not careful, the lure of power, fame, riches and pleasure can cause us to fall. Some of the world’s cultures, traditions and values are contrary to God’s ways and following them would mean disobeying Him.

God rebuked ancient Israel for their depraved thinking in the book of Isaiah: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.”<sup>8</sup>

The New Testament Apostle John warned the people: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”<sup>9</sup>

Jesus once told a parable where a farmer went to sow seeds. Some seeds fell on the wayside and the birds came and ate them up. Some fell on stony ground and they grew but they didn’t have roots to hold them. Some fell on thorns and they grew but the thorns also grew and choked them up. Some fell on good ground and they grew and produced fruits—some thirtyfold, some sixty and some a hundred. In the parable, the seed represents the word of God and the different outcomes represent the different responses to the gospel message. The first outcome or category represents those who hear the gospel but they ignore it and the Devil comes and takes it away from their hearts. The second category represents those who hear the gospel and welcome it gladly, but when they encounter persecutions or trials they give up. The third category represents those who hear the gospel and welcome it gladly, but the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches choke the message. The last category represents those who hear the message, accept it, and bear fruits in different amounts.<sup>10</sup> The first three groups of people gave up and didn’t produce any fruits while the last group endured and produced fruits. We have to

ask ourselves: in which category do we belong?

### **Self**

We human beings have the tendency to blame others (and even God and Satan) for our failure and misery. However, if we examine our lives, we have to confess that we too have gone astray. We don’t experience the happy, abundant life because we don’t obey God. We deceive ourselves and thus live short-changed lives.

God knows the condition of our human heart. Through the Prophet Jeremiah He tells us: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?”<sup>11</sup> The Book of Romans also echoes the same thing.<sup>12</sup>

King Solomon also talks about the ways of humanity in the book of Proverbs: “There is a way that *seems* right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”<sup>13</sup> So unless we listen to God and obey His voice, we too will perish.

We are a self-willed people, not a God-willed people. Like Adam and Eve, we too tend to trust Satan, society and self more than God. So we disobey God and deceive ourselves. That’s why we don’t experience the abundant life that God offers us.

### **Abundant life**

Living our lives, our way, will only lead to confusion, misery, heartache and death. We cannot hope to experience the abundant life that Jesus promised His followers.<sup>14</sup> Our way will only lead to short-changed lives. So don’t let anyone—Satan, society or self—deceive you into living a mediocre, unfulfilled and short-changed life.

Only God’s way is sustainable. Only His way—the way of giving, sharing and caring—can produce that abundant life that we all yearn for. God wants us to live His way of life and experience His abundant life here and now and forever in His Kingdom. Why settle for less when you can have so much more? □

<sup>1</sup> Galatians 6:7–8

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 5:19

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 5:8–9

<sup>4</sup> James 4:7–8

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1:31

<sup>6</sup> John 10:10

<sup>7</sup> John 8:44

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 5:20

<sup>9</sup> 1 John 2:15–17

<sup>10</sup> Mark 4:1–20

<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah 17:9

<sup>12</sup> Romans 3:10–18

<sup>13</sup> Proverbs 14:12

<sup>14</sup> John 10:10



# Let God be God

May I ask you a couple of personal questions? You don't have to respond out loud; silent answers will do. The answers are for you, not for me.

Here's the first question: Has your child ever gotten a bit rebellious, uncooperative or disrespectful?

And here's the second: Did you punish him or her? Remember, just a silent answer. No need to raise your hand.

Now let me ask you this: How long did the punishment last? More to the point: Did you decree that the punishment would last forever?

The very idea of it sounds crazy, doesn't it?

We, as weak and imperfect parents, forgive our kids for their "sins" against us. We might even punish them, but I wonder how many of us would think it fitting, or even sane, to punish them for the rest of their, or our, lives.

Yet some Christians would have us believe that God, our heavenly Father, who is not weak and imperfect, punishes forever and ever people who have never even heard the gospel. And

fascinatingly, these same people call God the God of grace and mercy.

Let's think about it for a moment. Jesus tells us to love our enemies, and yet some Christians think God not only hates His enemies, but burns them mercilessly and relentlessly for eternity.

Jesus prayed for His killers, saying, "Father, forgive them, because they don't know what they're doing." But some Christians teach that God only forgives certain people, the ones He predestined to forgive before He even created the Earth. Which, if true, means that Jesus'



by  
**Michael J.  
Fezell**

prayer didn't make a whole lot of difference.

## On our heads?

How often have you heard someone giving their "witness" speak about how miserable and guilty they felt over failing to present the gospel to someone who died? One Christian youth leader recently told a group of college kids a morbid story about how he met a person and talked to him, and felt an urge to present the gospel, but then didn't actually do it during their conversation. Then he learned that the man died, hit by a car, later that same day.

is so shockingly inept at actually saving people that He sends them to hell based on our incompetence. Standing steadfastly in faith in God's power and love with one part of their minds, they actually believe at the same time that God's hands are tied to save people if we fail to get to them in time.

"You are saved by grace and not by works," they say (rightly so), and yet they somehow have taken a most baffling detour to come up with the patently anti-gospel idea that people's eternal destiny is determined by our success or failure in the work of evangelising.

## Nobody slips through Jesus' fingers

As much as we humans love our kids, how much more does God love them? It's a rhetorical question—God loves them infinitely more than we are even able to love them.

Jesus said in Luke 11: 11–12, "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?... If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who



"That man is in hell right now," he told the young, wide-eyed, Christian students, "suffering indescribable agony." Then with a dramatic pause, he added, "and all that's on my head." He told them how he suffers nightmares about what he has done, and how he lies in bed sobbing over the horrible truth that because of him, this poor wretch will suffer the torments of fiery hell forever.

I marvel at the way some people can so expertly juggle their faith on the one hand that God so loved the world that He sent Jesus, with their faith (yes, it takes faith) on the other hand that God

ask Him!"

God really does love the world. And the salvation of what God loves depends on God, not how good we are at telling the gospel story. And God is really good at what He does.

So if you're carrying a burden of guilt about someone you didn't get the gospel to before he or she died, why not hand that burden over to Jesus? Nobody slips through His fingers, and nobody goes to hell because of you. (Who do you think you are, anyway?)

Our God is good and merciful and strong. And you can trust Him to be that way for everybody, not just for you. □

# Mental heal

**D**r. Emmanuel Joseph Pereira, a psychiatrist at Hospital Permai, Johor Bahru has been practising in a psychiatric set-up for the last 10 years. He deals with general psychiatric cases and has keen interest in areas of forensic psychiatry, addiction psychiatry, psychotherapy, research/training and psycho-education.

Dr Emmanuel and the team from Hospital Permai which also included counsellors and volunteers (including those from non-governmental organisations) offered support and counselling for flood victims at the hospital and relief centres in Johor recently.

*ST:* There is a stigma attached to mental illness? Why is this?

*EP:* Yes there is a stigma attached to mental illness. There are many reasons for this but I feel the main reason is that people are generally not aware and do not know what mental illnesses are all about, and that there are treatments available for it.

*ST:* Are mentally ill people likely to be dangerous—to themselves and others?

*EP:* It depends on the context or type of mentally ill people we are talking about. We need to know that there are many types of mental illness and a few types can possibly pose a danger to the patient and others. We are talking about danger in a very narrow perspective here (i.e. in terms of physical aggression, causing bodily injury and death). If we are talking about Major Depressive Disorder or Depression (in a lay person's term) for example, then we should know that there is a significant risk for morbidity (being disabled due to illness or being sick for a long time which can affect your daily activities/functioning) and mortality (in other words - death e.g. due to suicide or accidents in this context).

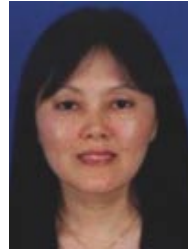
Suicide is the second leading cause of death in persons aged 20–35 years and depressive disorder is a major factor in around 50 per cent of these deaths.

In patients who have psychosis (a kind of severe mental illness), some studies have shown that the rates for violence are quite similar if not slightly higher to those who are not mentally disordered in this manner.

Minority of homicide offenders (those who commit the crime of murder) are mentally disordered i.e. the most common being attributed to alcohol and drug dependence, then personality disorder. There are only a few cases in which patients who suffer from psychosis and depression may pose a danger to others. Thus I feel there should not be any misconception and generalization that having a mental disorder can be dangerous in a very general sense.

*ST:* Many people refuse to seek treatment, thinking that a mental illness is 'all in the mind'. Is this true?

*EP:* I am not sure if majority of them perceive mental illness as 'all in the mind' but some may do so, and thus refuse to seek professional treatment. But then again, mental illness is a form of a 'disease of the mind'. More recent research with PET (Positron Emission Tomography) scans of the brain and other biochemical studies have shown that there are definitely some neurotransmitter changes or imbalance in persons having mental illness. Moreover medications targeting at correcting these imbalances have proven to be effective and thus strengthening the fact of the biological basis of these



by  
**Stefanie Tai**

illnesses.

Some might say that it is solely caused by the way we think. I have to admit that there is some truth to it as one method which is helpful in treating depression/anxiety is cognitive therapy (a treatment dealing with thoughts) where the client is made aware of negative thoughts that are making her/him depressed or anxious. But this is helpful only if the illness is mild or if it is done together when clients are on medications. Moreover these might not be applicable in other types of mental illness. But basically why many refuse to seek treatment is because firstly, they are not aware or do not know much about the symptoms that they are going through which they brush off as or attribute to stress or probably cultural beliefs such as being possessed. Secondly, most people attach a stigma to going to consult a psychiatrist. Try suggesting it to someone who is having mild to moderate depression (and is suffering sometimes without knowing what is happening to them) and they will turn around and say that they are not mad to go to see a psychiatrist. Thus, it is of utmost importance to educate the public (and so reduce the stigma) that having mental illness is just like having asthma, diabetes or hypertension.

*ST:* Can drugs really help in the treatment of mental illness?

*EP:* Yes definitely but of course not in all cases. There are so many new drugs being made available in Malaysia which are effective and cause minimal side effects. But then again in some cases, these need to be combined with other forms of therapy including psychotherapy (practical

# th interview

life application into people's thinking and behaviour). Other physical methods of treatment in some cases include Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) i.e. a small dose of electricity is passed through the head when the patient is sedated to alter the chemical imbalance. Spiritual exercises and meditation can be helpful in some as an alternative to psychotherapy.

poor appetite, feeling lethargic, having poor concentration, having inappropriate guilt, low self esteem, sense of hopelessness and eventually feeling suicidal), then early treatment would be most beneficial.

*ST:* How does clinical depression differ from other forms of depression?

*EP:* Actually when speaking

and if a client has 5 symptoms or more out of the 9 symptoms described above, for a duration of 2 weeks or more, then she/he is said to be having a major depressive episode and would warrant treatment. And clinically (which generally means anything involving or relating to the patient in a medical setting) the patient might seem to be depressed in the view of the psychiatrist. Sometimes the client might not have all the 5 symptoms required but instead might not be able to function properly e.g. unable to go for work or resorting to alcohol or substance misuse to alleviate their suffering and thus clinically can be diagnosed as having depression. There are other forms of depression e.g. atypical depression (those who don't have the usual symptoms of depression i.e. eating and sleeping a lot more, instead of poor sleep, or loss of appetite), seasonal affective disorder (depression that occurs during specific seasons e.g. during winter) and others but the treatment for these do not differ much.

*ST:* According to the World Health Organisation, depression is the fourth most disabling disease in the world, and in 2020 it will rise to being the second. It also estimates that more people die from suicide due to depression than from tuberculosis in the Asia-Pacific region. There is a rise in teen depression and suicide-risk once thought of as an adults-only disease. What are the likely factors contributing to the increase?

*EP:* What the statistics show is quite true. The world has changed and is changing at a rapid pace. The population has also increased and with all these the demands, challenges, competition, life style, values and others have changed. Thus the incidence of depression (the number of people afflicted



*ST:* What are the warning signs and symptoms of depression?

*EP:* There are no specific warning signs for depression but if a person is going through a stressful life and is unable to cope, or going through a loss e.g. of a loved one, job or health, or having poor support, and starts exhibiting symptoms of depression (such as feeling depressed most of the day, loss of interest in pleasurable activities, sleep disturbances,

strictly in terms of forms of depression, the term clinical depression does not really exist in the various standard classifications.

Well then, when it comes to the definition or rather criteria for diagnosing depression, two widely used classifications are the ICD-10<sup>1</sup> and the DSM-IV<sup>2</sup> classifications.

To put it simply, these 2 classifications outline the core symptoms of depression





with depression) has also increased. What is also evident is that in the past 50 years there has been a steady increase in the risk of depression in children and adolescents. These are associated with various factors which encompasses biological (e.g. genetic), psychological or social factors. Some examples of these risk factors include— family history/parent with mood disorder, loss of a parent or parental divorce, abuse (physical

or emotional), other negative life events, family conflicts, academic issues, relationships, substance abuse, chronic illnesses and the list goes on. Over the past decades too, teachers have been able to detect these children who seemingly have problems in school i.e. problems in their studies, in their concentration/attention in the class and their behaviour (e.g. missing school etc) and eventually referring them to the psychiatrist or

<sup>1</sup> *International Classification for Diseases*, 10th Ed. World Health Organization.

<sup>2</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental disorders*, 4th Ed. American Psychiatric Association.

advising the parents to do so. Thus there is also a higher detection rate. Another important issue to note is that the risk of suicide is high and so early detection and treatment should be of utmost priority.

*ST:* What are the treatments for depression?

*EP:* The main treatment for a Major Depressive Disorder would be medications and psychotherapy. There are many new medicines which are effective and have minimal little side effects available in Malaysia. Various psychotherapies are also beneficial in combination with the medications. Electroconvulsive therapy is only indicated for a few conditions including if the patient is highly suicidal. Another option is transcranial magnetic stimulation (where magnetic waves are passed through the head).

*ST:* How can we best support a family member or friend who is suffering from depression?

*EP:* I guess being there in times of need e.g. lending a ear, being non judgemental, learning about the illness with them, being non critical and not overbearing and the list goes on which can include engaging in spiritual and leisurely activities.

*ST:* Many Asian countries are developing at break-neck speed. The once slow-paced lifestyle is being replaced with a stressful one. What advice do you have for staying mentally healthy in such a world?

*EP:* Relax and have a hobby. Engage in a healthy lifestyle which includes the food you take and regular exercise. Go for a holiday (not necessarily going overseas) and spend time with family and friends. Develop good coping skills and for those who adhere to a religion, try out the spiritual options like engaging in prayer, meditation and perhaps volunteering/getting involved in community service for the underprivileged. And the list goes on. □

**Anonymous:**

Think young. Aging is for wine.

A sage once said that if an ocean liner could think and feel, it would never leave its dock; it would be afraid of the thousands of huge waves it would encounter; it would fear all of its dangers at once, even though it had to meet them only one at a time.

According to Linus Pauling, the world famous chemist and medical researcher, sufficient amounts of vitamin C and lysine may prevent and may even reverse atherosclerotic plaque build-up caused by lipoprotein-(a).

A word to the wise is sufficient. A word to the unwise is resented.

Honesty is like an icicle; once it melts, that's the end of it.

People with open minds must be careful these days. There are a lot of others around intent on throwing rubbish into them.

Worry is wasting today's time by cluttering up tomorrow's opportunities with yesterday's troubles.

If you want to be the picture of health, make sure you have a happy frame of mind.

I feel sorry for someone who has to win at everything.

Just about the time your income gets to the point where food prices don't matter—calories do.

Man without God,  
Man is nothing.  
God without Man  
is still God.

If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.

A gem is not polished without rubbing.  
A man is not perfected without trial.

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness... you are more blessed than the million who will not survive this week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation... you are ahead of 500 million people in this world.

If your parents are still alive and still married... you are very rare.



*What is true love?  
Love delights in giving attention rather than in attracting it.  
Love finds the element of good and builds on it.  
Love does not magnify defects.  
Love is a flame that warms but never burns.  
Love knows how to disagree without becoming disagreeable.  
Love rejoices at the success of others instead of being envious.*  
**James Keller**

A bit of fragrance always clings to the hand that gives roses.

**Chinese Proverb**

No man will make a great leader who wants to do it all by himself; or to get all the credit for doing it.

**Andrew Carnegie**

Learn how to listen and you will prosper—even from those who talk badly.

**Plutarch**

In all matters, before beginning, a diligent preparation should be made.

**Cicero**

Thank God every morning when you get up that you have something to do that day which must be done, whether you like it or not. Being forced

to work, and forced to do your best, will breed in you temperance and self-control, diligence and strength of will, cheerfulness and content, and a hundred virtues the idle never know.

**Charles Kingsley  
English clergyman/  
writer**

Nothing is interesting if you're not interested.

**Helen Macinness**

Organised thought is the basis of organised action.

**Alfred North  
Whitehead**

There are two types of knowledge. One is knowing a thing. The other is knowing where to find it.

**Samuel Johnson**

*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!*

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# What on earth

Wouldn't you like to ask God some questions? Perhaps you'd ask Him why He allows so much suffering? Or maybe you would ask about what happens when we die, what the afterlife is like, or what we will be doing for eternity? We would like fully to understand these great unknowns, wouldn't we?

But some things we just cannot know. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God..."<sup>1</sup> The Apostle Paul said, "Who has known the

mind of the Lord? Or who has been His adviser?"<sup>2</sup>, implying that none of us has even come close to understanding the vastness of God's thoughts. His ways and His thoughts are infinitely higher than our ways and thoughts.<sup>3</sup> His thoughts lie in a dimension entirely beyond our comprehension.

If we think we understand all of God's mysteries, we probably don't. It's okay to wonder, to meditate and speculate on these things, but



by  
**Paul Hailey**

our inability to comprehend all the details of God's master plan shouldn't trouble us. As an old friend said, "We will know more about these things five minutes after we die than we ever will in this lifetime." But the Almighty does give us a glimpse of His agenda, and clearly reveals what we need to know at this time. When we get to know His character through the pages of scripture we realise that we are in the good hands of a loving Creator, who has awesome plans for us. We are not here by chance, but by His purposeful and careful design. If we don't have it all figured out, no need to worry. He does have it all figured out, and His plans will not be thwarted. "The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the Word of our God shall stand forever."<sup>4</sup>

## God's awesome plan

In the very beginning, even before human beings existed, God stated His purpose when He said, "Let us make man in our image..."<sup>5</sup> That is what He is doing—transforming selfish, sin-ridden human beings into His image. And, since our perception of God is limited, we wonder what it means to be made into His "image". No doubt our perception of His "image" falls ridiculously short, but scripture does tell us that we will be given everlasting life and a nature free of pain, selfishness and sin. His word gives a vision of a future that will be full of peace, love, abundance, and activity. That sounds good to me! Very good!

Winston Churchill was right when he observed, "There is a great plan being worked out here below." We are the centre of that plan. God is moulding and shaping us, often through severe difficulties and painful lessons, into something worth keeping around forever. From our personal and sometimes national failures and difficulties we learn that sin doesn't pay. We come to admit that we need to be rescued, saved from ourselves





# is God doing?

and the sin that controls us. C. S. Lewis noted that “Pain is God’s megaphone to a deaf world.” The human experience, with all of our pains, hurts, and mistakes show us that we all fall horribly short in living a righteous life. And, yes, our human lives end when we die. No escaping that! We come to see that we need a Saviour if we ever expect to live beyond the grave. Christ is that Saviour. He conquered sin, and He conquered death so that we would have everlasting life. “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.”<sup>6</sup>

It is God’s magnificent purpose that we live forever with Him. Even the ancient man Job knew his certain destiny. “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God.”<sup>7</sup> Seeing God means being like Him, “in His image”. Obviously we will always be inferior to our Creator, but “in His image” implies that we will be transformed into something more like Him, better than we are today. The Apostle John tells us, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”<sup>8</sup>

Creation is not yet complete. Yes, God did make the heavens and the earth and everything in them a long time ago. He also made humanity with mind, emotions and the ability to design, build, and do other remarkable things. But the spiritual aspect of making us into His image is not yet complete. The Holy Spirit works in us to change us, instilling in us something of the very mind of Jesus. But our human lives will end and then will come the big change—the resurrection—when we will become fully made in His image.<sup>9</sup> The Apostle Paul foretold the



<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 29:29

<sup>2</sup> Romans 11:34

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 55:8–9

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 40:8

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1:26

<sup>6</sup> John 3:16

<sup>7</sup> Job 19:25–26

<sup>8</sup> 1 John 3:2

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:50–54

<sup>10</sup> Colossians 3:4

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:49

<sup>12</sup> Psalm 23:6

<sup>13</sup> Revelation 21:4–5

<sup>14</sup> John 5:17

<sup>15</sup> John 14:2

<sup>16</sup> John 6:40

coming glory: “When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”<sup>10</sup>

Some day everlasting life will be real. We will be transformed. Then we will fully understand what it means to be made in His image. “And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so we shall bear the likeness of the man from heaven.”<sup>11</sup> At that time we will become immortal and, as King David said, we will dwell in the House of the Lord forever.<sup>12</sup>

#### Then what?

Sometimes our human ideas muddy up our concept of what lies ahead. Take the common idea of heaven for example. I can’t get excited about sitting on a cloud and plucking harp strings. That might be fun for a few minutes, but forever? We may be thankful that scripture hints of greater things than that. We read of the end of sorrow, death, and pain, and the restoration of everything that is

good. And even more fascinating, we learn that God will “make all things new.”<sup>13</sup> Now, that is something to look forward to!

Even today God is vibrant, active, alive, and doing things. Around the heavenly throne there is activity and excitement. Jesus told His disciples, “My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”<sup>14</sup> Just before Jesus left this earth He told His disciples He was going to prepare a place for them.<sup>15</sup> You too can be His disciple. Accept His invitation and He will begin preparing a special place for you.

If you’re a skeptic (and in this world of religious hypocrisy and confusion I wouldn’t blame you), you are in for a pleasant surprise. God loves you and it is His will that we share eternity with Him. “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”<sup>16</sup> God invites all people (yes, you too) to share His vast creation with Him forever. □

# The New Covenant is

Christians are under the guidance and authority of the new covenant, not the old. This brings up an important question: What is the relationship between the two covenants?

It's sometimes said that the new covenant is a magnification of the old. In an informal way of speaking, this may be acceptable. However, by thinking of the new covenant as only a modification of the old, we may be led to accept the erroneous idea that the new grew out of the old. If the new covenant is only an expanded version of the old, so to speak, then this creates a question. Perhaps some of the practices (such as avoiding unclean meats) commanded under the old should also be commanded in the new? After all, if something has been added to the new covenant, why can't it include at least some of what was in the old?

Also, to say that the new covenant comes after the old is to imply that the new is only a Johnny-come-lately, whose existence depends on something that came before it. We might be left with the wrong conclusion that the old covenant is the real basis for the new. This is absolutely not the case. That's why the title of this article is "The new covenant is older than you think." This title insists on the ironic conclusion that the new covenant existed long before the old covenant did.

The old covenant existed on a much lower, physical plane. It was, we might say, a kind of teaching tool pointing to the intent of that which was God's original and ongoing purpose with humanity. This covenant had a limited existence for a specific time in history for a specific people under special circumstances. The best it could do was point, for a limited time and in a somewhat veiled way, to the reality of God's purpose in Christ—the new covenant.

On the other hand, the new covenant should be understood as timeless. We cannot attach an age to it, because it goes back to "the beginning." Since God's eternal purpose is as good as the reality, we can say the creation has never existed without the new covenant, even though it was as yet an unrealized intent of God's purpose.

The New Testament insists that the new covenant goes back to the beginning. Of course, such passages do not use the words "new covenant." For this reason we need to get a working definition of the new covenant so we can

by  
Paul Kroll

## Bondage to sin and decay

We understand this aspect of the new covenant from the New Testament. The apostle Paul, for example, summed it up with these words:

"The creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present

time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we are saved."<sup>1</sup>

Our bondage to sin and decay forms the underlying problem the new covenant is meant to deal with. Without the new covenant promises, every human would die and decay into eternal nothingness. God's purpose would be stopped dead in its tracks. But we know the rest of the story—the new covenant. God provided a means whereby sinning humans

could be rescued from the evil world order, from Satan<sup>2</sup> as well as from sin and death. God, in the person of the Son or Word, became a human being (Jesus Christ), would die for humanity's sins, and be resurrected as Saviour.

God would forgive humans their sins, image them in his Son through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, and ultimately raise them from the dead. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the new covenant. (In a sense, Moses exemplified the old covenant.) Under the new covenant, sin and death are defeated, and God's



understand when it is being spoken about. Essentially, the new covenant can be defined in the following phrase: the working out of God's purpose to create human beings to transform them out of their fallen condition into the image of his Son, and give them eternal life.

But here is where things get complicated. We infer from Scripture that God purposed human beings to be created in such a way as to allow them—if they choose—to become prisoners of the fallen world order, which includes sin and death.

# older than you think

purpose to provide humans with eternal life comes to pass. That is the new covenant in a nutshell.

*The new covenant did not come into existence with Christ's death, nor did it come into existence with Abraham. The new covenant came into existence as God's original purpose for the human race.*

But to say it again, the new covenant is much older—eternally older—than the old covenant. (Since God's purpose ultimately wins out, his purpose is as good as done, even before it occurs in fact.) A number of New Testament verses testify to the eternal existence of God's plan, now known as the new covenant. As stated earlier, they don't use the words "new covenant." Rather, these scriptures refer to the promise of Christ's atoning work and God's purpose to give eternal life in him.

Christ himself is the basis of the new covenant. Let's see, in rapid-fire fashion, how insistently these scriptures tell us of the eternal existence of the new covenant.

- The new covenant is God's "eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord".<sup>3</sup>
- Jesus (the Lamb) "was slain from the creation of the world".<sup>4</sup>
- We were redeemed from our empty way of life by the blood of Christ, who "was chosen before the creation of the world".<sup>5</sup>
- God's "work has been finished since the creation of the world".<sup>6</sup>
- It was God's purpose to choose humans for salvation "before the creation of the world".<sup>7</sup>
- The kingdom we are to inherit has been prepared "since the creation of the world".<sup>8</sup>
- God's purpose to save us and call us to his grace "was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time".<sup>9</sup>
- The new covenant has been eternally in existence. It is "the

hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time".<sup>10</sup>

## Hidden purpose

The new covenant is extremely old. It appears new only because it didn't come into general force until nearly 2,000 years ago. The fact of its existence before this time was generally hidden from human knowledge. (Of course, the new covenant was discussed and could be found in the Hebrew Scriptures, as we can see it there in retrospect because the Reality has finally come.)

One of Jesus' purposes was to reveal the prior existence of this eternal new covenant. Matthew, quoting one of the prophets, said of Jesus' teaching: "I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world".<sup>11</sup> Paul said God's new covenant purpose to include all people in his plan of salvation "has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints".<sup>12</sup> It was, said Paul, "God's secret wisdom".<sup>13</sup> Elements of the new covenant, however, were presaged long before the old covenant came to actual fruition. Here are some examples.

The new covenant ministry of Melchizedek existed before the old covenant ministry of Levi.<sup>14</sup> The new covenant high priest in the Melchizedek line existed before the old covenant high priest Aaron. John tells us that the Logos existed before Moses. The new covenant "fruits" of the Holy Spirit existed before the giving of the old covenant law at Sinai. (After all, the Holy Spirit is eternal.) And salvation was given by grace to people such as Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham long before the old covenant people of Israel.<sup>15</sup> In Galatians 3:8, Paul says God "announced the gospel"—the new covenant—"in advance to Abraham."

The fact that the new covenant existed before the old has many implications for us. As Christians,

we would want to look to that which came first—to the real thing—as our authority for truth and that in which we put our hope. That's the new covenant. We would not look to the old covenant, which was but a temporary imitation—a copy or shadow—of the new covenant that was from the beginning.

Since the old covenant has become obsolete, it would of itself not determine how we should worship God. The old covenant institutions—temple, Levitical priesthood, law etched on stones, various worship regulations and the sacrificial system—would not be normative for us under the new. That is, we would not determine what must be done under the new covenant by looking at the institutions of the old. The Book of Hebrews makes this clear. So does Paul in his letters.

## Shadow and reality

Let's summarise the difference between the two covenants. The old covenant institutions were the shadow; the new covenant is the eternally existing reality. The shadow does not speak for the real thing. The new covenant does not grow out of the old, neither is it a magnification of the old. Rather, the old covenant grew out of the new. Under the old covenant, Israel became the matrix or setting for the coming of Jesus Christ and his redemptive work.

The new covenant did not come into existence with Christ's death, resurrection and coming of the Spirit (although that is when the old covenant ended), nor did it come into existence with Abraham. The new covenant came into existence as God's original purpose for the human race. For us, only one conclusion is possible: The very old "new" covenant is our authority for how we are to live our lives in Christ and the framework—through Christ—of our faith. □

<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:20–24

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 2:2;  
1 Corinthians  
4:4; Revelation  
12:9

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 3:11

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 13:8

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 1:18–20

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 4:3

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 1:4

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 25:34

<sup>9</sup> 2 Timothy 1:8–9

<sup>10</sup> Titus 1:2

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 13:35

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

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians  
2:7

<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 7

<sup>15</sup> Hebrews 11:  
5–12



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