

THE Plain Truth

PP 12578/3/2008

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Jul-Aug 2007

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Before you divorce

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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Who will care for the aged?

With vast advances in the field of medicine, the lifespan of most individuals has significantly increased over the last two decades. More and more people have the privilege of living into ripe old age. The government is even considering extending the retirement age of government servants as more employees are at their prime in the current mandatory age of retiring. But for an increasing number of people, old age is a time of poverty, loss of dignity, humiliation, fear and extreme loneliness.

The situation has become so bad in some instances that the government is even considering a legislation to make it mandatory for children to provide care for their aged parents so as to prevent the aged from being neglected or abused. It is a heartbreaking sight to see the growing number of elderly people abandoned in nursing homes, care centres, hospitals and mental institutions. The worst affected are the elderly who have to join the ranks of the homeless, often having to sleep along the five-foot ways or street corners when the city falls silent late at night. Many have spent a whole lifetime working hard, sometimes doing backbreaking labour, just to provide, care for and educate their children. Is suffering and neglect the reward of the sacrificing soul?

Some would argue that the modern day situation simply doesn't allow families to be able to spend time, let alone care for their aged parents. Today's working hours can be long and stressful. Plus, there certainly will be little ones who need to be attended to. Who can bear with the constant fussing of the elderly more so if they are in poor health? In some

circumstances it does become necessary to send elderly parents to nursing homes especially if they suffer illnesses that require professional care. But what excuse can anyone give for neglecting to visit them? There are many instances when we can see the elderly in tears at nursing homes simply because no one bothers to visit them. Some have had none of their children visit them in years. They have been conveniently forgotten. Here lies the crux of

success of their offspring in life. To be left out or considered as a burden and being shouted at or verbally abused by their own kin is the worst form of torture that they can endure.

The Eternal God regards the care of one's parents as a very important aspect of life. One of the commandments that He gave to Moses in the Old Testament of the Bible clearly states the need to honour our parents. Not only that He promises to bless the children

who truly care for and honour their parents.¹ Perhaps no greater example can we have than that of Jesus Christ who at the time of his greatest suffering being impaled at the cross, upon seeing His mother alone pronounced her to be under the care of His disciple. Even at a time of extreme physical pain He would not allow His mother to be left uncared for.²

Today, more proposals are being made by the government to try to help the elderly including the setting up of day-care centres in most neighbourhoods so that working adults who do not have time to care for their aged parents

can at least leave them under good professional care. All this is commendable but ultimately the most pressing factor is whether we will continue to love our aging parents for no matter how difficult they can be, we need to remember that there was a time when we as children found love, protection, comfort and care in their loving presence. Eventually, they will leave us one day and the time to care for them is not later but right now. □



the problem. The elderly can understand the circumstances faced by their children who are unable to care for them effectively at home. Many nursing homes do provide excellent care for the aged often with excellent medical care, but they can never replace the love that the elderly need from their loved ones. Dignity, happiness and satisfaction for the elderly comes from the joy of being around their children and grandchildren and always being included in every family event, and seeing the

¹ Exodus 20:12

² John 19:25–27

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It opens up my heart on spiritual matters and helps me to understand more about Christianity and Christian living. Enclosed please find a cheque amounting to RM100 as my sincere contribution towards your excellent effort in broadcasting the message of hope and assurance which you have successfully achieved as your goal. Keep up the good work! Thank you for the THE PLAIN TRUTH circulation throughout the years. I miss articles written by Stefanie Tai. What happened to her?

Ruth Liew
Cheras

Ed. Thank you for your generous donation. It certainly will help us to send out more of THE PLAIN TRUTH magazines. Stefanie Tai remains one of our writers. Her articles will appear in our future issues.

THE PLAIN TRUTH articles are touching and encouraging. Thank you for sending it to me. May God bless all of you abundantly.

Phyllis Chee
Johor Bahru

THE PLAIN TRUTH gives us different perspectives of life, both traditional and modern.

S. Vangadasalam
Klang

THE PLAIN TRUTH is very informative, factual and spiritually enlightening for the man on the street.

Tan Chow Wei
Johor Bahru

In our journey called “Life”, no one is perfect, not even an angel. We make mistakes along the way and by correcting them and walking on the right path—that is what life is all about. That’s where THE PLAIN TRUTH plays a role.

Aponic K C Nair
Johor Bahru

THE PLAIN TRUTH has helped me spiritually and I find the articles interesting. Thank you.

Sally Chen
Kuala Lumpur



THE PLAIN TRUTH has got some very encouraging articles.

Peter Raj
Kuala Lumpur

THE PLAIN TRUTH has been enriching my life in many ways such as understanding people’s characters and never to ask God: “Why me?” when something doesn’t go the way we expect. We, as humans, can only plan but God has the ultimate good for us. I have to say a really BIG THANK YOU to THE PLAIN TRUTH for enriching me all these years. I gave my old issues to friends to help them understand and accept what God has in mind for all of us. Thank you once again.

Bhargavi Krishnan
Johor Bahru

THE PLAIN TRUTH articles feature the truths of the Bible and do wonders for all. The articles are very interesting and thought-provoking. Thank you for the kind work you are doing in God’s Holy Name. May God bless you all.

Mrs George Collins
Johor Bahru

THE PLAIN TRUTH is thought-provoking stories have enlightened and encouraged me to face all the challenges in my life boldly.

Lau Kai Thong
Kuala Lumpur

A picture paints a thousand words, but few words put together in an inspiring way can alter human emotions forever. I’ve always been aware of the various human emotions that hinder us from achieving our very best and have always tried to overcome them but without much success until I read THE PLAIN TRUTH. Thank you so much for the free magazine. I sincerely believe it will go a long way to improve myself.

Christine Seet
Johor Bahru

THE PLAIN TRUTH often attracts our interest. Every article printed is

worth reading. It also activates the spirit to search for the word of God that inspires us. It gives me encouragement from God. We thank THE PLAIN TRUTH co-workers who are so generous in sending every issue.

Alice Jacob
Teluk Intan

THE PLAIN TRUTH simply penetrates you and reminds us of God’s Grace and Mercy which is available to us all the time. I learnt to count my blessings instead of complaining of shortcomings. It brings me closer to God

Lydia David
Sungei Petani

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps me to understand the true teachings of Christianity and the real gospel.

Cheng Khee Chien

The information given in THE PLAIN TRUTH guides us spiritually and morally during our life journey.

P. Sivasubramaniam
Klang

THE PLAIN TRUTH is uplifting, constructive and educational in nature. There is a wide coverage of both biblical and world issues; ranging from doctrinal approaches to social, political, health and scientific perspectives. Overall, its content contains down to earth message. A job magnificently and professionally done!

Norman Wasti Duyung
Kota Belud

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.

Your 'delete' button

Don't we all have regrets in our lives? It may be a small error like saying the wrong word to a loved one or it could be a major disaster like putting one's lifelong savings in a bad investment. Whether small or big we all make wrong decisions that we live to regret. Sometimes we really wish we could delete the mistakes we made from our lives. In other words, we wish to be given a second chance and to live our lives again without committing those things that we now know are regrettable.

While writing this piece, I edited it many times and changed many words. I used the delete button on my keyboard countless times. Yet when we read this article we do not see the incorrect spellings or phrases. All of them have been deleted. If only life were like that!

A recovered former drug addict that I know told me recently how bad he felt on looking at his past. He started smoking cigarettes in his primary school days and moved on to marijuana in his teens. By the time he reached adulthood he was a heavy user of heroin. Over the next 15 years he was in and out of drug rehabilitation centres, was involved in crimes and spent a few years in jail. Although grateful that he is no longer drug dependent, he realises that the most productive part of his life is over. Even worse

is the hurt and harm that he has done to his family and loved ones. They may have forgiven him but the memories of the 'hell' he gave them cannot be erased from their minds. This man really wished for a second chance but found out that in life there is no delete button. Or is there?

More than two millennia ago, Jesus Christ came to this earth as its saviour and to bring the Gospel or good news to a humanity that

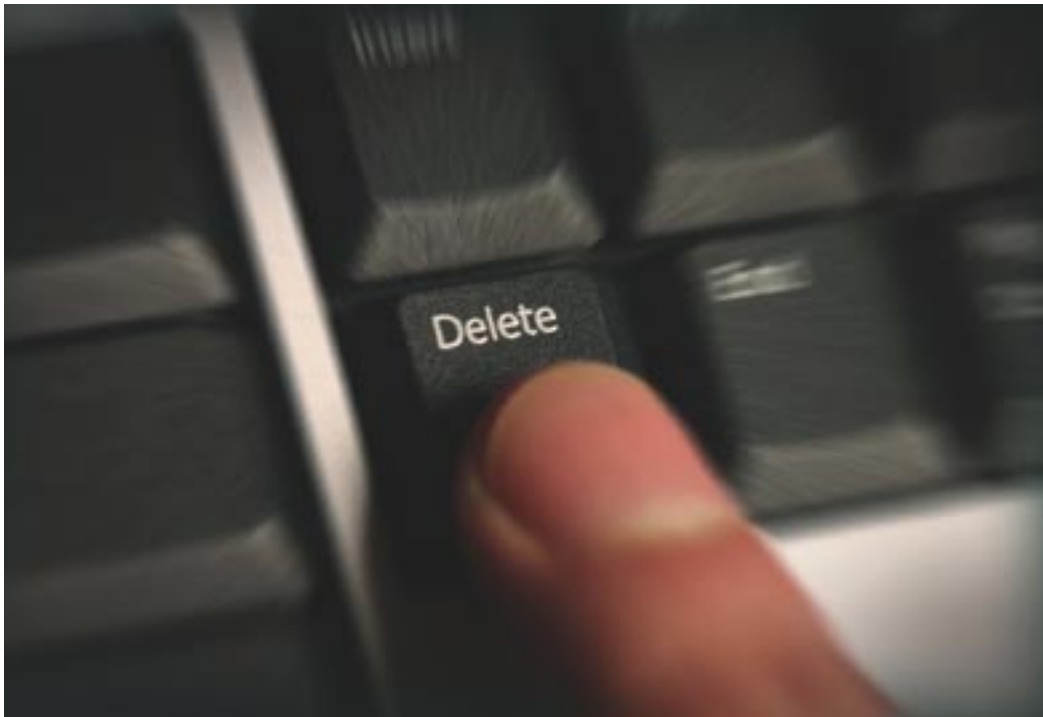
by
**Wong
Teck Kong**

is, when God forgives us, He forgives and forgets totally.³ He does not put them at the back of His mind and then bring it up again whenever we slip. He just never thinks about them again!

What about the person who is already a Christian? Does the delete button still work for a converted person? The answer is yes, provided the person repents of his or her sins and goes to Christ for forgiveness.⁴

The truth is no matter who or where

we are, no matter what we have done, there is always the delete button for us if we accept Christ as our personal saviour and welcome Him into our lives. If we are really sorry for our mistakes and sincerely want to change, Christ, our delete button, will wipe clean all the spiritual sins from us. Every time we approach God's throne of grace to confess our sins and to seek forgiveness, we



desperately needed a second chance. The message Christ brought to mankind is that if we accept Christ as our personal saviour, then our past sins and the penalty that comes with it (death) will be wiped clean. In other words our sinful spiritual slate will be deleted.

Isaiah tells us that when God forgives us, it is so complete that our sins which were crimson in colour will now appear as white in God's sight.¹ Not only will we be forgiven, but our sins too will be forgotten.² The Bible says that God removes our sins as far away from us as the east is from the west; that

are allowed to start afresh. Each new day for a Christian is like a new page where the grammatical errors and typing mistakes of the previous day have been deleted.

How different God is when we compare the world's religions, philosophies, cultures and value systems with Christ. No other religion in this world talks about a creator who died for the mistakes of His created ones, who forgives them and gives everyone a second chance. As long as we are alive and willing to change, the delete button is always there. And it is a lot better than the one found in my keyboard! □

¹ Isaiah 1:18

² Isaiah 43:25

³ Psalms 103:12

⁴ Acts 3:19; 1 John 1:9

Before yo

This is it, I can't take it anymore! This marriage is over! With these heated words, Jerry announced the end of 10 years of marriage.

His wife was disillusioned, depressed and frustrated. Jerry was not the man she fell in love with.

The fragile hearts of their three children were shattered. Their world was falling apart, and they felt so lost.

In desperation, Jerry turned to his friend for advice. His friend listened, then pointed out an important key in the Bible.

As the friend explained the scripture, Jerry was inspired with hope. He returned to his wife, and over the next few months this scripture began to open the door to marital healing. This same understanding can turn your marriage around and save your family from the heartache of divorce.

The apostle Paul revealed the enduring power of this principle when he said, Love never fails.¹

What is godly love, and where can it be found? The word love has been used so loosely that it has lost much of its true meaning.

This ain't love

In her song, *What's Love Got to Do With It?* (from the album *Private Dancer*, Capital Records, 1984), Tina Turner said of love, What's love, but a second-hand emotion.

Second-hand emotions masquerading as love have caused many divorces. Second-hand emotions rush people into marriage, and they can drop out of marriage.

The most common problem among married people is selfishness expressed in feelings. Many marriages fail because feelings fail.

In *The Case Against Divorce*, Diane Medved cautions couples about building a marriage on the shaky ground of fleeting feelings that masquerade as love.

One of the most critical facts I try to impress on couples who come to me for counselling is that passion fades. The sizzle fades, which to

many means that love fizzles, compared to what you first had or to what the media try to tell you love is fireworks, sexual frenzy, heated exploration (pages 21–22).

Some people marry because they think the other person will satisfy their needs. What happens when they do come together? They mutually take and take until they have taken all the life out of

mind that marriages crumbled because personal feelings were allowed to dictate behaviour rather than courtesy and dignity and commitment to one's spouse. The problem is that we've come to view feelings as solid and immutable, when in reality, we can shape them and choose them moment to moment (page 172).

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each other. The marriage becomes empty. Then they can throw it away, like some emptied soda can.

Dr. Medved has also found that feelings can lead people into divorce. Over the past several years the one thing we've been taught not to doubt is our feelings. Never

The real thing

In many marriages, the relationship is conditional on the performance of the partner: "I'll give to you if you..." At other times, it's based on the worthiness of the partner: "I give to you because you are..." Conditional relationships usually

u divorce

fail.

But godly love gives unconditionally. It is like the sun that never fails to shine. The sun does not shine on the water because it shines back, or on the land because it produces fruit. What the water and land do is irrelevant to what the sun does.

How can you recognise feelings for what they are and acquire godly love? Love is clearly a gift of God. He gives love to you so that you can give it to others.

Some have had it backward. They have looked for love in all the wrong places. They have looked to other people, especially to their wives or husbands, to fill them with love. But the truth is, only God can fill us with His love. He fills us through an intimate relationship with Him.

It starts with realising that He loves us unconditionally, even though we are not worthy: "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."² This is the model of love that is lived in many successful marriages.

To love or not to love. The decision is yours to make, and not a feeling to follow. Surrender your feelings for self-satisfaction to God. You will be amazed at the love that will spring forth.

Love in action

God's love is more than words. It is expressed in action toward one's partner. Let's look at 1 Corinthians 13 and see a few of the ways love can be expressed in marriage.

"Love is not self-seeking."³ This is the guiding principle in every situation of marriage. God will inspire you to seek the best for your spouse.

If you are seeking a divorce, are you seeking the best for yourself or for others? (In cases of physical and sexual abuse,

separation or divorce may be best for all concerned. It is wise to seek counsel on these serious issues.)

Have you considered the emotional, mental and physical effect on your family and community? Is it worth the imagined relief you think you will have after a divorce?

They say the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. But a beautiful lawn needs to be fertilised, watered and mowed. So why not give that kind of attention to your own partner. You may be pleasantly surprised as your marriage grows greener and more beautiful.

"Love is patient."⁴ You may not

"The most common problem among married people is selfishness expressed in feelings. Many marriages fail because feelings fail."

see immediate results; love takes time. You may feel the need to have your marriage fixed as soon as yesterday. But think about it, isn't that a cry for self-satisfaction? Doesn't your spouse need time to adjust to the new you?

Give your partner time. Give your husband or wife space to change his or her response to you. Most importantly, give God room to work in your partner's life.

You are not God. God does not force anyone to change. But He can work miracles if you give your partner time and space.

Patience costs you nothing, but a divorce may cost you everything.

"Love is kind."⁵ You may not feel like being kind. Your spouse may not deserve your kindness, but allow God to give kindness through you.

Acting on feelings has caused

many harsh and hurtful things to be said and done. Ask God to inspire and empower you to decide to give kind words and kind acts.

Remember, love is an act of the will, not the reaction of the emotions. You can choose to give kindness even in the face of bitterness.

"Love keeps no record of wrongs."⁶ In other words, love forgives, and forgiveness is an important key to reconciliation.

Let's face it, you and your spouse have both made mistakes. You can't live the past all over again, but you can have the past forgiven.

Decide to exercise love by forgiving your partner the way Christ forgave you. Forgiveness is one of the most

powerful medicines for the human spirit. It can heal your broken heart and marriage.

Your spouse will sense in you sweetness instead of bitterness, peace instead of anger. Your partner will experience the love of God from the gentleness in your voice to the sincerity in your eyes. He or she will be drawn to you, and may even be inspired to reconcile with you.

God's love through you

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."⁷ This blessing does not come from your partner. It comes from Jesus Christ, who loves you completely.

He will give you a joy and peace that is indescribable. He will satisfy your deepest longings in a way your husband or wife never can.

Why not sacrifice your feelings for self-fulfilment on the altar of love? Why not allow God to give your spouse the love you never could give? Why not allow God to take care of your emotional needs? Allow Him to love your partner through you, and save your marriage! □

¹ 1 Corinthians 13:8

² Romans 8:5

³ 1 Corinthians 13:5

⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:4

⁵ 1 Corinthians 13:4

⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:5

⁷ Acts 20:35

Do you know—really know

Ever wondered where was God during the tsunami that devastated the east coast of India and the other parts of Asia? Or the hurricane that brought destruction to New Orleans? Or the earthquake in Kashmir, India and Pakistan? Or the floods in some parts of India? Do such events ever cause you to wonder if God really exists? Is He just a figment of imagination? Ever wondered if He has given up on us? Many have. To know the answers to these questions we need to look at the history of God's relationship with man, and what happened in that history that makes God continue to deal with us the way He does.

Can you describe the feeling of holding a baby—your baby in your arms? It's difficult, isn't it?

My wife delivered our first child at her parent's home in Goa while I lived in Mumbai. I went to see her and my baby as soon as possible. Holding her in my arms for the first time gave me a thrill that's hard to describe. I felt the same for my other two children, but this was my first experience. This was my baby, my flesh! My wife felt the same and more so because she had carried her baby for nine months in her womb, was the first in the family to see her, carry her and nurse her. I could see a reflection of my wife and me in our baby. This was really the bundle of joy we were looking forward to.

God says we—you and I—are made in His image. Therefore, by looking at how human beings—at how you and I—act, we can begin to understand how God acts.

As I held my baby, hovering on the fringes of all that joy were tinges of sorrow, doubt and fear. I was going through a difficult time with my job. I couldn't even go to Goa immediately and see the baby for some time because of this cloud hanging over me—the fear of losing my job. Would I be able to provide for her? Care for her? Give her the best that life had to offer? How would this little child—my little child—turn out?

That's exactly what God must have felt when He created Adam and Eve.

by
Joe D'Costa

A great risk

Adam and Eve were a physical reflection of Him with the potential to become more like Him in the future. God declared that all He created was very good. This is the biggest understatement in history! God reported with pride to Job, "The morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy" at the creation of the world. What God created was superlative.

While God was filled with joy and satisfaction at creating a being like Himself, if He is like us, then maybe at the back of His mind was a tinge of doubt about how His experiment would eventually turn out. Would these human beings love Him, make Him their role model or would they become something else?

Fortunately God isn't like us—though we are like Him. When God created us, He called into being what had existed before only in His imagination. Along with every free choice He built in a limitation. He chose to construct a world of time and space. God sees the future, past and present all at once, but for us He selected a world of sequential time, just as an artist selects a canvas, brushes and colours to "freeze" the moment the artist is painting. God, in the creation account (Genesis 1) made something new every day. This involved many decisions and choices. What unfolds for us is a topography that boggles the mind. God's creation during that first five days did not have freedom to choose. All the plants and animals were governed by instinct. They were made predictable.

But in the case of man, God took a risk. He gave Man, unlike everything else He had created, the capacity and freedom to love his Creator or to rebel against Him. Humanly speaking, it was a great risk. How is it, then, that the Sovereign God could take such a risk?

God met with setbacks

Why would Adam and Eve want

to rebel? They lived in paradise where everything they desired was available. God was approachable; they could speak to Him like we speak to a friend. But there was one forbidden tree, the one with the enticing name, "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Apparently, God was keeping something from them. What secret lay behind that name? How would they ever know unless they tried? Adam and Eve made their own creative choice; they ate the fruit, and the earth has never been the same.

Did God hide from man? No! Even after they sinned, God actually came into the garden as usual, like a friend seeking His human friends. No, it was man who chose to hide from God.

Genesis 3 shows exactly what God felt when Adam and Eve disobeyed: sadness over the broken relationship; anger at their denials; and an emotion surprisingly like alarm. "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."¹ God so loved these people that He didn't want them to live forever, now that all knowledge was going to lead them down the paths of suffering. He loved us so much that death for us, short term, was the better option.

In those early days no one could accuse God of being unfair. He seems to us to be very like a close hovering parent of a two-year-old child. When Adam and Eve sinned God confronted them with their choice and explained to them that they and the generations to come would have to adjust to the choice they made.

Just one generation down the road and a new horror is introduced into the world, murder! Cain kills his brother Abel. God reacts with quick and speedy explanation and punishment. After that the state of affairs on earth

—that God loves you? (Part 1)

deteriorates to the point that the Bible sums up so poignantly “The Lord was grieved that he had made man on earth, and his heart was filled with pain”.² Behind that statement stands all the shock and grief God felt as a parent.

God felt responsible for everything he had done so now, lest things get any worse, God toyed with the idea of destroying all mankind.

He probably would have destroyed the earth completely too if Noah hadn’t come along—the one man of faith who “walked with God.” After the remorse expressed in Genesis 3 to 7, we can almost hear God give a sigh of relief when Noah in his first act back on dry land, worships the God who saved him. At last, someone for God to build on!

Years later, in a message to Ezekiel, God mentioned Noah as one of His three most righteous followers. It took Noah 100 years to build his ark and throughout that time he stayed faithful to God in the face of undoubted ridicule by those who watched him construct it.

No, Noah proved to God that His experiment with man was not hopeless. It could work. And at the end of Noah’s flood, God’s response was that He promised Noah and all his human descendants that God would never again destroy all His creation by a flood. This may seem to be a simple act, but in that one promise we see that God limits Himself again. He, a sworn enemy of evil in the universe, pledges to endure wickedness on earth for a time or to solve it without annihilation.

Just as any human parent of a runaway teenager, God seems to have forced Himself into the role of the waiting father. The story of the Prodigal son (Luke 15) applies to God as Father and human beings as prodigal sons. In earliest history then, as we have seen, God acted so plainly that not one of his human children generations later

could ever accuse Him of hiding from them or of silence towards them. It’s God’s intention to have a mature relationship with free human beings, but, as the Bible records, He met with a series of rude setbacks by His children.

How, then, could He ever relate to His creation as adults, when they kept behaving like children?

A new plan

God determined to leave man to his own devices for a while, just like many fathers have done.

In Genesis 12 we find a momentous change. For the first time since the days of Adam, God stepped in—not to punish, but to set into motion His new plan for human history. There is no mystery in what He had in mind. In Genesis 13, 15, 16, and 17 as well as several other passages of Scripture he tells Abraham forthrightly: “I will make you into a great nation, with many people bearing your name, and from that nation I will bless all peoples on earth.” Rather than trying to restore the whole earth at once, God would begin with a pioneer settlement with just one man.

Despite the honour accorded to him as the father of this new race, Abraham emerges as the Bible’s first example of a person who might himself have been severely disappointed in God! Miracles he had and many visions. He entertained angels and bargained with God over Sodom and Gomorrah like we do with the vegetable and fruit seller every day. Yet after the promise of a son, there is a long bewildering silence.

God, you see, works harder with the ones He sees as having potential for important positions in His kingdom, and in so doing often subjects them to severer trials and tests—trials and tests that are the only path for the person to grow in faith and trust in God. Abraham learned to believe when there was no reason left to believe. Abraham did not live to see his descendants

fill the earth like the stars in the sky, as He was promised.³ He only saw one, Isaac, which means laughter, a memory of lack of faith on Sarah’s part.

God waited till Sarah crossed the child bearing age, and until Abraham was incapable of fathering a child before He stepped in miraculously to provide one. Scripture⁴ tells us that God was to provide the child, not Abraham.

But it didn’t end there. History repeated itself generation after generation among the Hebrews. The esteemed matriarchs of the covenant, Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel all spent their best childbearing years despairingly barren. Somehow that faith was what God valued, and it soon became clear that faith was the best way for human beings to express love for God.

As we read Genesis we cannot help but notice how God slows down in His involvement with mankind. In the beginning His interaction is intimate, the punishment swift and communication direct, but by the time we come to Joseph, God chooses to speak at arms length, in dreams. It’s as if God had once again deliberately decided to pull back, hands off, so that Joseph could develop a new level of maturity in his relationship with Him.

Through all his trials Joseph learnt to trust God—not that God would prevent hardship, but that He would carry Him safely through hardship. Choking back his tears, Joseph tried to explain to his murderous brothers: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good...”⁵

Genesis ends not with millions of billions of Hebrews but with a group small enough for the Bible to name all of its sons.

In the next issue we will continue our study of God’s efforts to build a relationship with man. We have so far seen God’s great concern for mankind and his direct intervention in their affairs especially the affairs of the small group of people he chose to work with in a special way. □

¹ Genesis 3:22–24

² Genesis 6:5–7

³ Genesis 15:5

⁴ Genesis 17:17;
18:14

⁵ Genesis 45:5

Your child's

As the last bridesmaid began her measured walk down the aisle, little Anthony looked quickly to John. Seeing John's reassuring smile, the boy moved forward, gingerly holding the satin cushion before him. Wendy, smiling through her veil, followed on the arm of her father.

"Who's the cute ring bearer? A relative of John and Wendy?" a woman sitting in the audience asked quietly of a friend of the couple being married.

"No. I understand he is one of John's students."

"But, doesn't John teach special education? Don't many of his students have major learning disabilities?"

A special child

Indeed, 11-year-old Anthony did have learning disabilities. He had such severe problems that he had to live separately from his parents, who were now proudly watching him perform his part in the wedding of his teacher, John, and John's bride, Wendy.

John had come to have a love and concern for the child, and the feeling was mutual. A bond had been formed between the boy and his physical education instructor.

"This child had a lot of behaviour problems, so he lived with five other children in a group home where he could have around-the-clock care," John said. "But, I knew Anthony could do this, and I wanted to give him the chance to show himself and others that he could."

Anthony was a student in John's PE class in a school programme for severely disabled children in Los Angeles. Now Anthony would forever have his role in John and Wendy's new life together.

Even though this happy story may be outside the ordinary, John's example does show how much some teachers deeply care about their students, no matter how difficult the circumstances may prove to be. Many teachers, such as John, not only care about their individual

students while they are teaching them, they also care about their future lives. Their students' successes are their the teachers' successes.

But who are children's first and most influential teachers? Their

parents, of course. God holds parents, not school teachers, ultimately responsible for training their children. This is especially true when it comes to Christian values.

As the apostle Paul wrote to the

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no.1 teacher

Ephesian Christians: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”¹

Emphasis on training

Notice where Paul puts the emphasis in teaching, training and instructing children. In Paul’s time and for generations since, the focus of child rearing was on discipline—many times harsh discipline—not on nurturing and training.

Paul warns parents—especially fathers, who during Paul’s time had absolute authority and control over their families—not to cause their children to be angry, but to teach them in Christian love.

How can children who resent and fear their parents love God and His ways? This is especially true when parents try to justify abusiveness, which includes neglect of their children, with the Bible.

This principle was so important that Paul also included it in his letter to the Colossians: “Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.”²

Proper teaching, which includes proper loving discipline, takes time. And we all know time is scarce in most of our lives today.

One young mother went back to work part time after her children were in elementary school. She works at a law firm in a large city four days a week, dropping off her two boys at school on the way to work and leaving her job in the early afternoon to pick them up.

“We are so busy at work that I feel guilty leaving early to go pick up my kids,” she confides. “And, the single mothers who must work full time to support their families really envy me. I’m very aware of their feelings as I leave early every day.”

This family goes to church together, prays together and plays together. This couple’s boys know that their parents love and care for

them. And, the children have good feelings toward their teachers.

Of course, many working mothers are single, without the support of a husband. If you are in such a situation, make sure your child knows you are trying to be there for him or her as much as possible. Life isn’t always ideal, but parents should do all they can to show their children love and concern, regardless of their circumstances.

The major key

Most teachers will tell you that parental involvement is the major key to children’s success in school, and in life. They will also tell you that if you want your child to have Christian values in this amoral world, you had better take on the responsibility of teaching them yourselves. Instilling Christian values is the responsibility of parents. U.S. public schoolteachers can be, and have been, sued for teaching such values from the Bible.

If you want your children to love and respect God, you will have to set aside the time to instill Christian values, right in your own home. From earliest childhood, read the stories of the Bible to your children. Use some modern-language versions with lots of colourful and appealing illustrations. Explain the lessons these Old and New Testament stories were written to teach. Make them some of your children’s favourites.

Along with reading to them from God’s Word, build your children’s faith in God by teaching them how to pray. Make God real to them. Show your children that although you as parents and they as children will make mistakes, God is perfect in His love. Reassure them that God has unconditional love for them. No matter which faults they may have or errors they may make, they can come to Him for forgiveness.

Teach them also, however, that God has high standards. Show your children, for example, that God

teaches respect for authority, not contempt; that God expects us to tell the truth, not lie; that he encourages us to give to others, not steal from them. The rising rates of juvenile crime should convince us that children don’t automatically acquire high ethical standards. They must be taught by their parents.

Yes, our time is limited. Economic and social conditions force parents to work, sometimes long hours away from their families. So make what time you have with your children count. Show your children that they are priorities in your life.

By your actions you show your children that reading to them, playing with them, helping them with their homework are more important to you than watching television or talking on the telephone or playing cards with your buddies or shopping at the mall with your friends.

It takes time

As much as they might want to, teachers have little time to work one-on-one with children. If your children aren’t taught the values that make them successful in their relationships with others, whether they be authority figures or peers, they will have difficulty with the challenges of school, and life in general. And, with one humiliating failure after another, they will get discouraged and finally quit trying.

Take time to be your child’s number one teacher. Because, whether for good or bad, you will be his or her number one teacher. You are your child’s first and most influential teacher in life. Your children’s successes are also your successes. And, even their setbacks can be successes if you teach your children how to handle the failures that will come in life.

Teaching Christian values takes time. As disciples of Jesus Christ, that means we must make time for our children. □

¹ Ephesians 6:4

² Colossians 3:21

We are living in

Do we see “the signs of the times”? “Mark this,” Paul wrote. “There will be terrible times in the last days.”¹ And what do we see now? America at war. Shootings in our schools. Disasters in the weather. Is it all coming to a climax? Will World War III soon be upon us?

We are living in the last days! —and we have been for almost 2,000 years. The last days, said Peter, were already here in the first century.² “In these last days,” we are told in Hebrews 1:2, “God has spoken to us by His Son.” “The last days” began with Jesus Christ! When Paul told Timothy about the last days, he was not so much predicting the future as describing his own day. He was telling Timothy what kind of world he lived in.

Wars have always been with us. Natural disasters have plagued humanity for millennia. Societies have been breaking down, and violence has been erupting, for centuries.

“You will hear of wars and rumours of wars,” Jesus said, “but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.”³ There will be famines and disasters, but those are only the beginning of problems. There will be persecutions, and there will be predictions. People will say it is just around the corner, but do not believe it. Do not be alarmed. Just persevere. Just do the job set before you.

Someday, the end will indeed come. But rumours about the end have been greatly exaggerated. The world has had many disasters since the last days began nearly 2000 years ago, and I am sure that there will be many more. God can end the world whenever He wants to, and I will be happy for the great day to come, but I do not see any biblical proof that it will be very soon.

Frankly, we need faith and hope whether or not there is a war, whether or not the end is near. We need faith and zeal no matter how evil the days are, no matter how many disasters strike near us. Our



by **Joseph Tkach**

responsibility before God does not change with the times: Our job is to preach the gospel, to preach repentance and forgiveness, to teach those who believe, and to worship God.

When we survey the world scene, we may see disasters in Africa, Asia, Europe, and America. Or, if we look with slightly different eyes, we may see fields white and ready for harvest. There is work to be done, as long as it is day. There is

redemption of our bodies.”⁵ We are eager for the travails of this world to be over, but we are also patient.⁶

Peter gives the same outlook. He also waited for the day of the Lord, when the elements will be destroyed.⁷ What advice does he give us? “You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God.”⁸ That is our responsibility day in and day out. We are called to live holy lives, not to make predictions the Bible does



work to be done, and we must do the best we can with what we have.

Jesus calls us to perseverance, to running with patience the race set before us. Paul likewise speaks of the end, when the children of God will be revealed, when all creation will be liberated from bondage.⁴ How then do we live? “We groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for...the

not authorise us to make. We are to be faithful in our daily lives.

Nevertheless, in the last days there will be people with a veneer of godliness but denying the power of Jesus Christ. There will be people who deceive and are deceived, people who proclaim the end is near. Do not be alarmed; do not be deceived. Simply do what

“The Last Days”

God has been telling His church to do for nearly 2,000 years: worship, teach and preach.

God will take care of the timetable—our job is to be found faithfully working, whenever the end happens to come. Correct predictions don't count for anything on the day of judgment—only faithfulness will be rewarded.

Nevertheless, some people seem anxious for the end to come. They would do well to heed the words

speculators often mix nationalism in with their prophecies. They are interested in the welfare of America specifically, as if Americans are in greater need of repentance than the Chinese are. They want national repentance so that God will “heal this land” and they can live in peace and safety. Many of them assume that if America obeys God, then we will reap the blessings God promised to ancient Israel.

Shouldn't spiritual blessings for others be a greater incentive for us to want them to turn to God? Didn't Jesus tell us to be concerned about all nations, not just our own?

In this fallen world, God allows natural disasters, sins and evils. He also causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on the good as well as the bad. As both Job and Jesus show, He also allows evil to fall upon the righteous. This is the way God allows the world to function.

For the ancient nation of Israel, under a special covenant, God promised that if the nation was obedient, He would prevent the natural disasters that normally fall upon both the wicked and the righteous. He did not give that guarantee to other nations, nor did He say that other nations could elect themselves to a position of most-favoured nation in His sight. Modern nations cannot claim as promises the blessings God offered specifically to Israel in a special covenant that is now obsolete.

The Bible makes no guarantees that even if all of America repents, that we will no longer have any troubles. The new covenant, the better covenant, offers spiritual life rather than guaranteeing physical blessings. By faith, we are to focus on the spiritual, not the physical.

Physical things are not wrong, of course, and God often does intervene in physical affairs to help us. But the new covenant does not make guarantees as to when and where He will do it. The new covenant calls us to faith despite the circumstances, to faithfulness despite persecution, to patience despite an eager longing for the better world that Jesus will bring.

Here is one more thought that may put prophecy into better perspective: Prophecy's greatest purpose is not to get us to focus on dates—it is so that we will “know the Lord.” Prophecy is to point us to Jesus, the best of all possible blessings. Once we have arrived at our destination, we no longer need to focus on the path that brought us to Him. □



of Isaiah:

“Woe to those... who say, ‘Let God hurry, let Him hasten His work so we may see it. Let it approach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it.’ Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.”⁹

It is interesting that the prophecy

Repentance is a good thing, of course. It is good to have peace and safety, and I would enjoy such blessings just as much as anybody else. But I wonder about the propriety of wanting other people to repent so that we can enjoy the blessings. Does not repentance begin at home, beginning with our personal self-centeredness?

¹ 2 Timothy 3:1

² Acts 2:16–17

³ Matthew 24:6

⁴ Romans 8:19–21

⁵ Romans 8:23

⁶ Romans 8:25

⁷ 2 Peter 3:10

⁸ 2 Peter 3:11–12

⁹ Isaiah 5:18–21

Train a child: an exami

Few things sap the morale of committed Christians like the announcement from a son or daughter that he or she will no longer be attending church services or are leaving the Christian faith.

"I must have done something horribly wrong," some members will say. "What does my teen's leaving Church reveal about my attitude and example as a parent... as a Christian?" Sometimes there

is a tendency to feel bitter or resentful toward the teen, the ministry, the Church or even the promises of the Bible itself.

In such times Proverbs 22:6 can haunt Christian parents: "Train a child in the way he should go, and (even) when he is old he will not turn from it." This simple proverb can, if misapplied, be a source of stress and upset, and it can even draw criticism from other well-meaning but sometimes wrongly reasoning believers.

Some people begin to look down on the family in which this has happened.

Usually, though, the hurt is primarily with the parents. "But I did everything the Bible said to do," some parents protest. "I did train my child, and just look how she has turned out! What went wrong?"

To answer this question fully, we have to take a long look at the

subject. We will appear to be taking an indirect route to reach the desired end. This is because we will move beyond the simpler, one-dimensional mind-set with which it is easy to view Scripture.

The enigmatic little word genre can help shed light on this important matter. What is more, it can even help ease the pain in this complex matter of youth leaving the faith. Before that, however, we

by
Neil Earle

Revelation.

To explain Proverbs 22:6, then, we must first ask another question: Is this verse about spiritual status and training, or does it give wisdom about a physical skill? Many proverbs are about practical matters of this physical world. Is Proverbs 22:6 God's divine, universal promise that He will convert the sons and daughters of

believers without any consideration of their freedom to choose?

What is Proverbs 22:6 talking about? The Soncino Commentary makes this comment:

"...the verb is derived from the Hebrew word for 'education' *chinnuch*—in the way he should go... 'according to his way'. The intention is not 'the way of uprightness and good living' but 'for the way in which he is to spend his life.' Whatever occupation he is later to follow it is



should review another important word, context.

Most Christians agree that each scripture of the Bible can be understood properly only in relationship to where it is in the Bible. The context involves not only the neighbouring verse, but also involves the wide-angle lens of the whole Bible—the message of salvation from Genesis to

necessary to prepare him for it in his early years, because then habits are formed which influence his conduct in manhood."¹

Derek Kidner's commentary on Proverbs mentions that "...The training prescribed is... implying, it seems, respect for his individuality and vocation."² Keil and Delitzsch also stress "the education of youth".

It seems clear that the emphasis

nation of Proverbs 22:6

in Proverbs 22:6 is vocational and educational rather than spiritual. It is more a career emphasis than a guarantee of conversion. The New Jewish Publication Society Translation renders this verse as: “Train a lad in the way he ought to go; he will not swerve from it even in old age.”

It seems evident that this verse is an encouragement for parents to equip a child with the proper career skills with which to succeed in life rather than the verse being a matter of faith or conversion. Many scriptures stress the moral training of children; this is not one of them—at least not directly.

This is the point at which the subject of “genres” can help us.

Genres: literary and others

There are times in the academic world when certain words are high on the literary stock exchange. Genre is now such a word. A genre is, according to Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, “a distinctive type or category of literary composition, such as Indian treaties, promotional tracts, and theological works.” There are musical, as well as, literary genres. Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony is one genre, the kind we rather loosely call classical, and rap music is an altogether different and modern style or genre.

One point we always have to keep in mind in dealing with the Bible is that we are confronting a massive and gigantic literary composition, indeed, the most important literary composition ever produced, more like a small library than a single volume or book.

While the Bible is user friendly, to use a modern term, and invites us to explore its mysteries (see, for example, Proverbs 9, where Wisdom is personified as an inviting and competent host) it is still a book to approach with respect. F.F. Bruce spells that out very colourfully:

“If we enquire into the circumstances under which the

various Biblical documents were written, we find that they were written at intervals over a space of nearly 1,400 years. The writers wrote in various lands, from Italy in the west to Mesopotamia and possibly Persia in the east. The writers themselves were a heterogeneous number of people, not only separated from each other by hundreds of years and hundreds of miles, but belonging to the most diverse walks of life.”³

The lesson here is that the Bible is a most remarkable book. It needs to be studied with care and application. Yet, still remarkably, almost anyone even a dying thief on a cross can be touched by its message. To excavate its depths and difficulties does, however, take some digging and studying. It has been said that the Gospels are deep enough for an elephant to drown in and shallow enough for a gnat to swim across.

It all comes down to respecting the diversity and cultural contexts of the Bible and the various literary genres employed. As Bruce reminds us:

“The writings themselves belong to a great variety of literary types. They include history, law (civil, criminal, ethical, ritual, sanitary), religious poetry, didactic treatises, lyric poetry, parable and allegory, biography, personal correspondence, personal memoirs and diaries, in addition to the distinctively Biblical types of prophecy and apocalyptic.”⁴

Law or principle?

All of this leads to a key question: Is Proverbs 22:6 a law or a principle? Does Proverbs 22:6 carry the weight of an ironclad law of the universe with as much binding force behind it as the Ten Commandments? The answer is no. Proverbs 22:6 is an evaluation of a principle, not a law. Why? Because it falls within the genre of “Wisdom Literature”.

Proverbs 22:6 is indeed a God-breathed, inspired scripture. Yet,

we should remember the literary style of the section to which Proverbs 22:6 belongs. Proverbs 22:6 is a reflective summary statement. It is not intended to be an absolute guide to living that is universally applicable to all situations that believers find themselves.

Do I mean that everything in the Bible cannot be taken just at simple face value? Correct. Many parts of the Bible demand a little deeper excavation because of the literary genre and because of the relative positioning, the literary ecology. The “proverbs” represent brief, capsulised, general, summary scriptures that relate to selected aspects of life—in this case the succinct reflection by one who has observed enough specific examples to compress a slice of life into an overall general principle. The principle is this: Children from a decent home exemplify some of the occupational and career values and habits from that home that make them good citizens for the rest of their lives. That’s what Proverbs 22:6 was meant to say.

Is this an inspired word of God? Absolutely! Is it true for us today? Yes. Do we see it working around us in many Church families? Of course! But we could ask, what about the many fine Christians we know who do not have sons, only daughters? Or what about those who have no children at all? The answer is obvious. We just cannot take every statement of the Bible at sheer face value. The Bible’s Wisdom Literature needs to be approached carefully if we are to extract the message with precision.

In their book *Reading The Bible For All Its Worth*, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart correctly summarise: “Proverbs are not guarantees from God, but poetic guidelines for good behaviour.”⁵ □

¹ Cohen, A. ed. *Soncino Books of the Bible: Proverbs*, London, Soncino Press, p.146.

² Kidner, D. *The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, Leicester, InterVarsity Press, p.147.

³ Bruce, F.F. *The Books and the Parchments: Some Chapters on the Transmission of the Bible*, Rev.ed., New Jersey, Old Tappan, 1963, p.88.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Fee, G.D. and Stuart, D. *How To Read The Bible for All Its Worth*, Zordevan, 1982, p.203

Is the Gospel

The gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to change us. It has the power to change us to become examples for our Lord. It has the power to transform us into a mature disciple of Jesus Christ.

There once lived a man who was very religious. He belonged to the Jewish faith and tried to be a good Jew by keeping all its tenets. He obeyed the law of God with utmost strictness. So zealous was he that he had a passion to have others also live the same way he did. He would want others to obey the same laws he did.

disciple of Jesus Christ. He went on to become a leading apostle of the Christian faith in the years ahead. He changed his name from Saul to Paul. This same man wrote the following passage in scripture: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes... For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith..."¹

Gospel—the power of God



by
**Dan
Zachariah**

Christ. It has the power to change us to become examples for our Lord. It has the power to transform us into a mature disciple of Jesus Christ.

The question then is how much transformation has occurred in us through the many years we have believed in the gospel? Do we still struggle with the same problems in life or has the gospel brought changes and relief from those problems? None of us are perfect, and so to attain perfection in this lifetime is impossible. But

we can experience transformation and reformation because we have believed in the gospel that has the power to reform.

Let's look at three areas in our lives that can experience reformation through the power of the gospel.

Our relationship with God

As we live under the believing power of the gospel we will begin to live with a more conscious presence of God in our lives. God will become more real to us. We learn to connect with God more often through prayer and through

our meditative and Bible study experiences. We will expect God to help us in our times of need and we will readily go to Him for the solace and guidance we need.

We will be conscious of the fact that we are members of the Body of Christ which is the Church of God. We will connect with this Body regularly through fellowship and opportunities to worship and serve together. Our Christianity becomes more giving rather than just receiving.



He would be so upset with those who would not follow him that he even engineered persecution against them. He tried through coercion to have them follow what he believed in. Then came the dramatic turnaround.

In an encounter with Jesus Christ in a vision he was introduced to the gospel. As he came to understand the Christian faith more fully the change in him was equally dramatic—from a fanatic, fundamentalist he became a zealous

The gospel, according to what the apostle Paul has written above, is the power of God. It has the power to make us fit for salvation and an eternal relationship with God. It has the power to grant us a righteousness that we cannot attain ourselves. It can also perfect our faith in Jesus Christ and the righteousness of God.

Simply put, the gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to change us. It has the power to change us for the better as disciples of Jesus

changing you?



Jesus becomes our role model rather than movie stars or TV personalities. Our homes will become more like a church where there is prayer and worship on a regular basis.

¹ Romans 1:16–17

Do you see that you may need to change in some areas mentioned above? You can make the changes if you want to. Because you have the power to change. The gospel grants you that power.

Our family life

As we continue to receive strength through the believing power of the gospel our family life will change more than anything else. We will become more sensitive to the family members around us. Husbands and wives will become more faithful to each other, not only in moral terms but also to one another's needs.

Parents will be more responsive to their children and not be absentee parents like what is happening in some homes today. Children will live with a more conscious sense of the authority of their parents.

Are there some changes that may be needed in your family? You can bring about the changes because you have the power too.

Our personal habits

The power of the gospel can transform our personal habits too. For example, our time will be used more wisely. TV is one of the biggest time wasters in our society. Many people watch more TV than is necessary. Added to this is religious TV. Some cannot stop watching all the preachers in town. There is nothing wrong with watching this if it is done with balance.

Our habits on socialising also undergo changes. Some socialise in excess, thus making their family and personal lives suffer. Some socialise far too less and they need to get out and meet people more often as Christians are not hermits. All these should be done in balance.

How about personal habit of drinking, type of entertainment indulged in, personal cleanliness, hygiene and other activities we are involved in? If any of the above is abusive, then transformation must take place.

Can you make changes in these areas? Yes, you certainly can, because you can have the power from God too. Ask Him for the power to help you make these changes. May God bless you and grant you the transformation that you desire. ❑

The weaker vessel—what does that really mean?

Simon Peter had never heard of “political correctness”. He was a creature of his times as we are of ours and, accordingly, he may have said things that were perfectly understandable and acceptable in his day that modern people find neither understandable nor acceptable.

For example, when Peter said that husbands should be “considerate” and “treat their wives with respect” he gave as one of the reasons the fact that a wife is “the weaker partner”. Actually he called her a “weaker vessel”.¹

I remember on one occasion quoting Peter and being besieged by young women who challenged me to run a marathon, lift weights and do various other endeavours! Others reminded me that women outlive men and that if they were allowed to exercise their moral sensitivities we would have less war, more compassion, and the world would be a far better place. Moreover if it weren't for women, the missionary enterprise would be in danger of grinding to a halt, and many churches around the world would be emptier than they presently are. While I have a definite regard for Peter, I couldn't argue with the statements these women were making. I tried to assure them that Peter was not making any negative comments about their undeniable abilities.

“Why, then, did he call us ‘weaker partners’?” they asked.

“Actually, he didn't. He called women ‘weaker vessels!’” I replied foolishly.

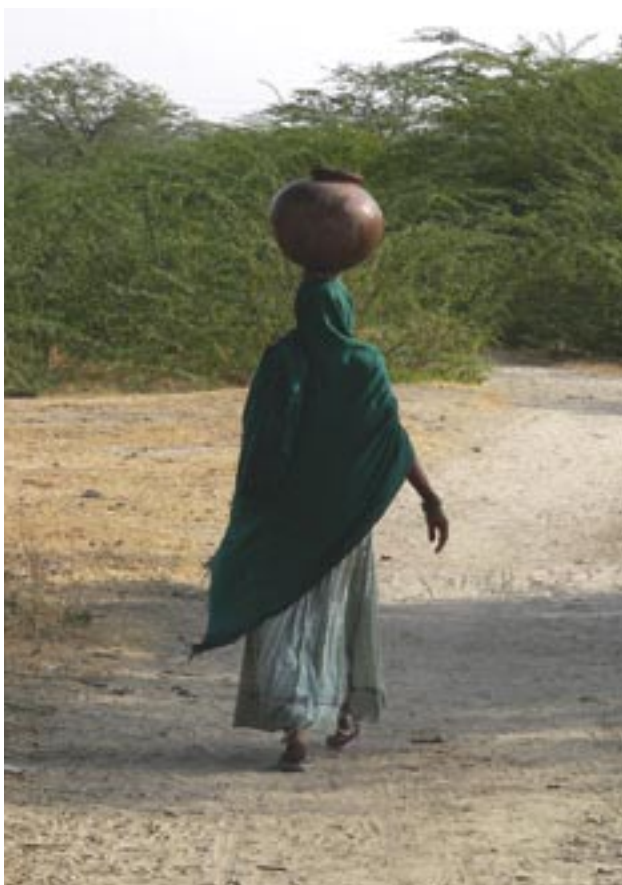
“Vessels?!!” they said, unsure whether that meant vessel as in tugboat or water pot, but being unimpressed with both.

That led to the necessity for further clarification. So here it goes!

By using the word “vessel” to describe a wife, Peter was paying her a compliment. The word *skeuos* means a possession that is useful, as a pot is useful for carrying water or a sail is useful for providing wind power for a boat. It looks as if Peter is encouraging husbands to look at

their wives as some kind of useful possessions! But it's obvious that the writers of the New Testament had a much higher view of people, including wives, as vessels and used the word in another sense. Paul, for instance, said that someone rightly related to the Lord could become “an instrument (*skeuos*) for noble purposes, make holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.”² So “the weaker vessel” is

by
**Stuart
Briscoe**



potentially the kind of person who is capable of producing all kinds of God-glorifying and people-blessing attitudes and actions. Now that's the way for a man to think about and talk about his wife!

But what about the “weaker” part? Peter did not say “weak.” He used the comparative word “weaker” implying that the husband is also weak, but in some ways the wife is weaker. Paul

wrote about the immense sense of privilege that was his as he went about his ministry. That is the same way that God, in creation, commanded light to shine out of darkness. He had “made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”³

Then he added, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay.” Guess what? Paul's “jars of clay” are literally “earthen vessels”! He knew they were weak vessels with all kinds of flaws, but these deficiencies allowed the light within to shine out. It was in His weakness that Christ was strong.

So where does this leave the wife? First of all, she is a vessel and that is an honour. Secondly, she is a weak vessel because that is the only kind there is, but through her weakness the glory of Christ can and should be clearly in evidence and that is her calling. But that still leaves us with the sticky issue of the “weaker vessel”.

Great care should be taken here because women are in no way intellectually, morally or spiritually weaker than men. In fact, quite often it is the reverse. Peter's statement suggests the uniqueness of the wife's physical and sexual makeup. She is a weaker vessel than the “man vessel” because her frame is not built to withstand the stresses that a male physique can handle, and her sexuality is such that she is more vulnerable than the male. She deserves to be treated with courtesy and understanding by her husband because he knows that the woman with whom he shares his life has weak points of which he knows very little.

She is a vessel in which the glorious knowledge of God is clearly apparent and through whose life this radiant knowledge is plain to see. A little consideration and a lot of respect will warm a woman's heart and enrich a wife's life. That's what Peter was talking about. □

¹ 1 Peter 3:7

² 2 Timothy 2:21

³ 2 Corinthians 4:6

Perseverance

Perseverance allows you to get back on track when you hit a detour.

Perseverance is the ability to keep going in the face of continuous challenges. It is the ability to disregard distractions and to stay focused.

You may have to take detours to get to your end goal. But, as long as you persevere and realise that the detour is simply another alternative path in the direction of your goal, you will continue to move forward.

Those who see a detour as a reason to quit, lack perseverance. You will always face challenges as you work towards your goals. Your ability to persevere will determine your ultimate success!

It takes effort and belief to persevere and stay dedicated to accomplish your goal. When you find yourself doubting whether the effort is worth it, visualise how you will feel and what you will have once your goal is completed.

Persevere, and don't let any self-doubt distract you.



Your life is the sum result of all the choices you make, both consciously and unconsciously. If you can control the process of choosing, you can take control of all aspects of your life. You can find the freedom that comes from being in charge of yourself.

Robert F. Bennett

Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after another.

Walter Elliott

Letting Go

Letting go is not to stop caring—it means I can't do it for someone else.

Letting go is not to cut myself off—it's the realisation that I can't control another.

Letting go is not to enable—but to allow learning from natural consequences.

Letting go is not to admit powerlessness—which means the outcome is not in my hands.

Letting go is not to change or blame another—it's to make the most of myself.

Letting go is not to fix—but to be supportive; it's not to judge—but to allow another to be a human being.

Letting go is not to be in the middle, arranging the outcome—but to allow others to shape their own destinies.

Letting go is not to be protective—it's to permit another to face reality.

Letting go is not to deny—but to accept.

Letting go is not to nag, scold, or argue—but instead to search out my own shortcomings and correct them.

Letting go is not to criticise and regulate anybody—but to try to become what I dream I can be.

Letting go is not to regret the past—but to grow and live for the future.

Letting go is to fear less and live more.

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

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

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Selangor,
Malaysia.*

Standing in

“OK, I can see that we’re saved by grace and not by works, but I’m still not clear on a couple of things. For example, some passages in the New Testament indicate that we won’t be saved unless we are doing good works. How do those passages fit with the passages that tell us we are saved by grace and not by works?”

Good question.

The truth is, just as these passages tell us, we cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we are righteous, unless we are meeting the righteous demands of the law of God (that is, the law of Christ, not the law of Moses). That is a fact, and there is no way around it. Unless we are righteous, we are doomed.

The bad news is, the righteous demands of the law, which are indeed righteous demands, leave us in exactly that position: doomed. Why? Because we don’t have what it takes to be sinless. “There is no one who is righteous, not even one,” Paul reminds us.¹

But that is where the gospel comes in. The gospel, which is, remember, good news, tells us that God made Christ, who was sinless, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.² Like the man said, it is good news.

That means we are saved by, and only by, God’s gracious acts of love on our behalf. In spite of our rebellion, He loves us and wants us in His kingdom.³ His eternal banquet of joy and celebration is so important to Him that He has decided to have it overrun with guests even if the only guest-pool in the world is made up of nothing but loser, ne’er-do-well, no-good-nicks.

God wants us at His eternal dinner party, and He has made sure we can have, free of charge (because we haven’t got the price of a ticket), the soapy scrub-down, fragrant oils and clean clothes not to stink it up. He has made sure, with no help from us, because we bring nothing to the arrangement but our smelly, dirty selves.

So, when we read a passage like

Galatians 5:24, for example, we need to keep firmly in mind that this kind of person is exactly who God has made us to be in Christ. We are not righteous of ourselves; we are righteous only in Christ, and only by God’s grace, and we can know that only by faith.

We can believe it or not, but that is what God says He has done. If we believe it, we will welcome the scrub-down and the clean outfit.

If we don’t believe it, that is, if we don’t accept God for who He is, the Father of Jesus Christ through whom He has saved the world, then we will simply continue the futile masquerade we call life and cut ourselves off from the joy of real life waiting for us in God’s banquet hall.

Standing in the light

In the kingdom of God, righteous pretenders aren’t welcome. Only sinners who know they are sinners, and who trust God to forgive them and make them righteous in Christ, are allowed in. Pretenders, who think they are in some way more deserving, or more acceptable, or less dirty than the others, can’t stay. They remain in their sins because they won’t give up their little righteousness charade and trust God fully to be their righteousness.

Knowing what God has done for us and in us, we are led to work on ourselves to overcome the sin that so easily entangles us.⁴ But keep this in mind: we are accepted as righteous by God only because of what Christ has already done for us, not by our three-stooges-Keystone-cops-overcoming-performance, which is the best we can ever muster.

The Holy Spirit in us moves us to devotion, but the victory in which we participate is the victory of Christ.⁵ We can enjoy the glorious fruit of His victory only by trusting Him, not by improving our behaviour.⁶

When we rest in Christ, the peace of God removes our doubt,



by
**Michael J.
Fezell**

fear, anxiety and worry.⁷ We are secure in Him, like a helpless baby comforted in his mother’s arms.

When God sent His Son to die for our sins and to be raised for our life, He made two things indelibly clear:

- 1) He loves us immeasurably and unconditionally, to the point of taking our burden as His own, even to the point of death, and
- 2) Our salvation was entirely His work; there is nothing we can do to save ourselves.

Sin

What is it about sin that makes it so bad? Sin amounts to an inseparable gulf between us and God. Imagine what would happen to, say, a tomato plant if it suddenly declared independence from soil, water and light. Without resting in the elements that produce its life and growth, the wretched little plant is doomed.

It can never be what it is, a tomato plant, without soil, water and light. It can never do what tomato plants do—bear tomatoes—without soil, water and light. Yet our little rebel tomato plant, if we can still call it a tomato plant, has decided it has a better plan toward self-realisation than the natural plan that makes tomato plants be tomato plants.

Sin amounts to a state of declared “independence” from God. It cuts us off from the very source of our life and being. It is refusal to be who we really are, who we were created to be, in a mad effort to be who we think we ought to be. Sin is more than mere actions. It is the very condition of our lives. Individual sins are merely the natural fruit of a corrupt heart.

On our own, because we are sinners, we are like that tomato plant, trying to scratch out a life for ourselves in a hostile world, ignorant of the fact that we are not even stuck in the ground. Lying as we are in the dark on the concrete sidewalk, the best we can hope for is to stay as green as we can for as

Christ alone

long as we can and finally wither up and die.

But the gospel tells us that we are not on our own. God has come to our rescue and planted us in the rich, moist soil in broad daylight. What can we do about it? The truth is, there is nothing we can do about it. But we do have a choice about whether we will believe it and enjoy it or deny it and shut off our roots and close our leaves and go on pretending we are lying on our side in the dark on the sidewalk. Such tragic pretense can end only in withered ruin.

Dead in sin, alive in Christ

To put it another way, if any one of us is fog-brained enough to think we are actually acceptable and righteous before God because of our devoted efforts to do what is right and avoid what is evil, then what can anyone say? Imagine a spoiled can of Spam shedding a layer of its reeking, bacteria-infested mass and then humbly telling you that it would now, free of that layer of putrefaction, make an acceptable lunch for you, and you have something of the idea.

In other words, no matter how much you overcome, no matter how many sins you shed, no matter how many bad habits you replace with good ones, no matter how much better you are today than you used to be, it is still fourth down and one million yards to go.

That is why we need to get our minds off ourselves and onto our Lord and Saviour. We need to give up on ourselves and put our trust in Christ. He fixes us from the inside out.

Quit looking at the evidence you see in your life and start trusting Him to be for you and do for you what he says He will be for you and do for you. Quit worrying that He will not be faithful on account of your being a sinner, and start trusting Him to forgive you and clean you up like He said He would.

You see, it works like this: your

unfaithfulness does not keep God from being faithful. He will be faithful because that is the way He is—faithful. You can stick out your tongue at Him all day long, and He will still be faithful. You will have a sore tongue and you will miss out on all the fun He wants you to have, but in spite of your wooden headedness He will still be faithful.

He will not stop loving you and He will not stop knocking on your door, hoping you will let Him come in and have supper with you. He is, and always will be, faithful, even when you are not.

We are free even to deny Him. We are free to give up on Him. We

grieve for you, because He loves you, but He will not force you to trust Him.

He earnestly wants you to trust Him and receive the glorious benefits of His grace, mercy and love, but the choice is yours.

You ask me if you can sin and still be saved, and all I can say is that you are a sinner and God saves sinners, so there can be no other answer but yes. You ask me if I am trying to encourage you to sin, and I answer, no, I am not; I am encouraging you to trust God to love you and forgive you and save you in spite of your sins, because that is what He promises to do.

You ask me how a person can

“...your unfaithfulness does not keep God from being faithful. He will be faithful because that is the way He is—faithful.”

are free not to believe Him, even to hate Him. We have that choice, the choice to love our own self-defined pseudo-lives and turn down His gift of real life. We don't have to enjoy His kingdom. He will let us stew in the misery of sin and death if we want to.

Even so, He will always remain faithful, never forcing Himself on us but always desiring our love.

As Paul wrote: “The saying is sure: If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He will also deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself.”⁸

You can get yourself into all the trouble you want, and God will still be faithful. He will hurt for you and

have true faith in Christ and still keep sinning, and I answer, it would be nice if we believers would quit sinning, but nobody, ever, in all history has quit sinning this side of death. You try to think of some other way to ask it, and I still can answer no other way and be faithful to the Word of God.

We are all sinners, and God saves us anyway, because saving sinners is what He does. That is not an invitation to sin; it is simply a fact. God remains faithful to us even when we are unfaithful to Him, and thank God it is so. If we put our trust in Him and admit we are sinners, He is faithful and just to forgive us.

Saved by grace

“But God will not save us unless we change, will He?”

Change how much? Change a little, change a medium amount, change a lot? Listen! God saves sinners. He heals the sick, not the healthy.⁹

“Mike, you know what I mean. You have to change at least some, or He will not save you.”

God does not save on the basis of human changes. He saves on the basis of His own righteousness.¹⁰

“Come on. You know what I mean. If you believe, and Christ lives in you,

caring about it? That is precisely what believers can't do. Not that there is a rule against it. There doesn't have to be. When you love somebody, you care, that's just the way it is. The fact that we are believers means we do care about it.

The very thing that believers are trusting God to do is to forgive their sins and raise them from the dead. People who sin without

course, but they also care about something else even more: God. They care that God says sin is wrong, they care that sin destroys, and they don't want to be sinners, which is why they want to be forgiven.

They trust God's Word about everything, including sin, they care about the fact that God loves them and has forgiven them, and they care about loving, thanking,



then you have to put sin out of your life or you won't be saved.”

OK, how much sin do you have to put out? All sin, most sin, some sin, a little sin? How much sin have you put out? How much sin is still left?

“Look, I may not have all the answers to your cute little fast and loose in-my-face questions, but I know this much: God is not going to save us if we just keep on sinning and not even caring about it.”

Ah, now we're getting somewhere. Who said anything about not even

caring about it, you see, do not, by definition, care about whether God forgives them for sinning. They might figure that it's nice if He does, but it's all the same to them if He doesn't.

In other words, to them, it doesn't matter what God thinks, one way or the other. They only care about one thing: themselves, which is why they don't mind sinning in the first place.

Believers, on the other hand, care about themselves too, of

praising and serving their gracious God.

Believers fight their sinful nature, desiring to live in harmony with their calling in Christ. But when they sin, as they all do, they trust God to forgive them for the sake of their Advocate, who is their Saviour. That is, they ought to trust Him to forgive them. But with all the legalistic you'd-better-measure-up-or-go-to-hellfire preaching and teaching loose on the planet, tragically, many Christians live in

dread that God will in the final analysis reject them because of their sins, not save them.

Ask the average churchgoer, “How do you avoid hellfire?” He will say something like this: “By living a good life.”

That is not the gospel, but it is the common perception not only of John Q. Public, but also of John Q. Churchperson. Why is it the common perception? Because that is what has passed for preaching in untold numbers of Christian pulpits for centuries. Believers are lured in with promises of grace, then held hostage by a long and slippery list of required moral demands necessary in order to stay on God’s good side. It is called religion.

The gospel, however, is not religion. The gospel is a loving God’s good news to humans: “I love you so much that I sent my Son, so that by putting your trust in Him you will not perish but live in joy and peace with Me forever.”

Let him who thinks he stands...

When we love God, we obey Him. Right? Well, maybe that works for you—maybe the fact that you love God moves you into a life of faithful obedience and steady purity. It doesn’t do that to me. I love God with all my heart, and in many ways I do better than I used to when it comes to sin, but I still grieve the Holy Spirit a whole lot more than I want to.

God’s children want to obey Him. The Spirit of God in us leads us to obey Him. Our consciences, appropriately, plague us when we know we are disobeying Him. Still, two things to remember:

1) We have been forgiven already, and 2) We keep sinning no matter how much we overcome.

The person who thinks he stands is the very one who needs to take heed.¹¹ Why? Because nobody stands except in Christ. Even with all the apostolic urging to do what is right, not one of us actually walks a pure and holy life—except as we are held in Jesus, and that life is invisible to us.¹²

Unless our righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, Jesus said, we have no part in the kingdom.¹³ What? The Pharisees were the most careful and devoted law abiders around! They took the word of God seriously, and they devoted themselves scrupulously to observing it. But Jesus said

that anyone who will be in His kingdom must have even greater righteousness.

Do you have such a level of righteousness? I sure don’t.

And that is just the point. Salvation does not come by what we do, no matter how good we are—or think we are. Our righteousness is the righteousness of Jesus,¹⁴ and our faith is in His promise of deliverance, not in what we can do.¹⁵

So how do we stand? By admitting that we are stone dead, flat on the ground, unable to lift a finger, and by trusting Christ who raises the dead.¹⁶

How do we stand? By faith in the God who justifies the ungodly.¹⁷ How do we know we can trust Him? Because He has proved how much He loves us by sending His Son.¹⁸ How much proof do we need to be able to put our trust in Him?

us the real life we don’t yet see, the one that is hidden in Christ with God.

The two cannot exist together. We must give up the fake life we hold so tightly with both hands in order to grasp the real life God continually holds out to us.²⁰

Serious about sin

Yes, we do need to “get serious” about overcoming sin. But we need to do so in the context of complete assurance that we are God’s forgiven and beloved children for Christ’s sake.

We need to get serious about overcoming sin knowing full well that God has not and will not reject us because of our sins, and that He will always stand with us in our struggle against sinning. The only thing that can cause us to “lose” our salvation is for us to stop caring about it altogether and stop trusting God.²¹ Even then, God will continue to

“Salvation does not come by what we do, no matter how good we are—or think we are.”

¹ Romans 3:10

² 2 Corinthians 5:21

³ John 6:40;
2 Peter 3:9

⁴ Hebrews 12:1–3

⁵ Ephesians 2:4–7

⁶ Romans 6:27–28
⁷ Philippians 4:6–7

⁸ 2 Timothy 2:11–13

⁹ Mark 2:17

¹⁰ Romans 3:21

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 10:12

¹² Colossians 3:3

¹³ Matthew 5:20

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:30

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:8–9

¹⁶ John 11:25

¹⁷ Romans 4:5

¹⁸ Romans 5:8

¹⁹ Colossians 3:3–4

²⁰ Matthew 6:24

²¹ Hebrews 2:3

²² Revelation 3:20

²³ 1 Corinthians 13:7

²⁴ Colossians 3:3

What does He have to do? Die for us? He did just that. More than that, He was raised for us too. And it is in Him that our true life is hidden with God until it is revealed with Him when He comes.¹⁹

Then we shall see ourselves for what we really are, for what He has made us, and we can accept our resurrected life, which includes and springs from our death, or we can reject it in favour of what we have always had, this pitiful excuse for life we see all too clearly right now.

We can keep the crisp five bucks Monty Hall gave us for the two used Kleenexes in our back pocket and think we have really got a handle on life, or we can trade it all in for what’s behind the curtain—trusting God’s gracious promise that even though we can’t see it yet, it is the mother of all jackpots.

In other words, we can die to all the things we thought were worth fighting, clawing and bleeding for in this world, and trust God to give

knock on our door, earnestly desiring that we answer it and let Him in.²²

The bottom line is, fight sin tooth and nail but quit worrying that your failures, setbacks and dry periods cut you off from God. They don’t. God is not arbitrary in His love for you, nor does He keep score.²³

He is absolutely true to His covenant promise; He will never leave you nor forsake you, and you can count on that no matter how deep in the miry pit of sin you have wallowed.

In His eyes, even while you still wage war with your sins, you are already new and righteous with Him in Christ.²⁴ He sees you for what He has made you in Christ, not for what you have made yourself by a lifetime of wrong turns, bad decisions, weak moments, failures and sins.

Again, that is why this gospel is good news! □

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