

THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Feb-Mar 2013

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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A new year—a new life

For many people, the new year is a time to leave old problems and fears behind and get a fresh start on life. The trouble is, for most of us, the old problems and fears just won't stay behind us. We want to press forward with our lives, but mistakes, sins and trials seem to have us shackled to the past.

The truth is, though, that for the sake of Jesus Christ, God has forgiven and forgotten our sins. Even though

we may still have to live with some of the effects of our sins, we no longer need to feel guilty about them. We no longer need to worry that God doesn't love us or that he doesn't accept us. We no longer need to feel afraid that we might not make it into his glorious kingdom! Yes, we are sinners. But God says that for the sake of Jesus, we are forgiven.

It is my earnest hope and prayer that you will enter the new year with the full assurance of faith that God has forgiven you and made you his beloved child. Think of it! You stand innocent before God. God himself has stepped in to pay your debts and crown you with the dignity and honor of a beloved child!

No matter how far you have advanced or not advanced in your career, no matter how far short you may fall of your personal goals, no matter what sins have marred your life, no matter what a mess you've made of things, no matter how you or others perceive your status or importance in life—regardless of all these things, when you believe the gospel, you belong to God. You are now his, and he makes all things, including you, new.

It isn't that you are suddenly transformed into a faultless person. It's that God has given his grace to you. You see, friends, it's not about what we deserve. It's not about how successful we've been or how hard we've worked. It's about love. It's about a God who loves us

by
Dr. Joseph Tkach

in spite of ourselves. He loves us so much that he did everything that needed to be done to save us from ourselves. He became a man, a human like us, and died on the cross without sin to save us from death and release us from the power of sin in our lives.

Paul refers to God's grace toward us as an indescribable gift.¹ Humanly, it seems far too good to be true. Yet it is true. And it is my prayer that you will

know and feel the wonderful truth of God's precious gift to you. That's what the church is all about. It is about worshiping our Redeemer. It is about letting the Holy Spirit lead us to be conformed to the image of Christ. It is about believing the gospel and accepting God's love. It is about letting God's love in us spill out on each other



and on all those whom God brings into our lives. It is about sharing the wonderful truth of freedom from guilt and sin and death to all who will listen and believe the good news.

In this world there are important people and unimportant people. In the kingdom of God there is no such thing as an unimportant person. Every person is infinitely important. We are all part of one another through the Holy Spirit. We are one in Christ, and what happens to one of us affects all of us. Every time you have reached out in love to another person, you have helped build and extend the kingdom of God.

Even though the kingdom will not be here in its full glory until Jesus returns, he lives powerfully in his people now. And your gospel work in Jesus' name—whether it's a kind word, a helping hand, a listening ear, a sacrificial labor of love, a prayer of faith or a telling of the story of Jesus—is moving mountains of doubt, tearing down walls of hatred and fear, and attacking strongholds of rebellion and sin. □

¹ 2 Corinthians 9:15

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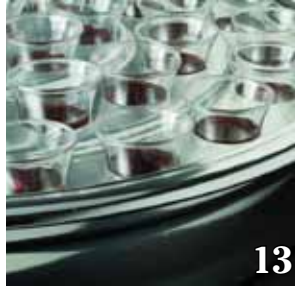
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What our readers say:

I receive many visitors into my Home (Bethany Home) where I serve as pastor, counsellor and as assistant director. Somehow we talk about issues regarding faith and life because of THE PLAIN TRUTH. The pictures and articles are an inspiration and very helpful in our devotions and quite time of prayers.

Rev. Karthik Sibanyanam
Hutan Melintang, Perak

Thank you for the article on prayer in the Sep–Nov 2012 issue of THE PLAIN TRUTH magazine. At first the long list of scriptures in the blue column was rather daunting, but I learnt so much. Praise God for the insight that you share with us. Keep up the good work!

Tzillah Wong
Ulu Kelang, Selangor

Hi, I would like to contribute to your team for producing such an interesting magazine, THE PLAIN TRUTH, and would appreciate if you could give me your bank account number so that I can transfer money online. Thank you once again for the great magazine. God bless you and your team.

Sharon
Ed: Thank you for your kind compliment and your desire to support THE PLAIN TRUTH. We thank God for giving us the opportunity to participate in Jesus' ministry. Readers like you who pray, contribute and share the gospel are also part of that ministry. You can find THE PLAIN TRUTH account number on page 4.

In response to your letter about THE PLAIN TRUTH, here is a donation of RM100 as a token of appreciation to you and all the staff for making the magazine available to me and many others. May God bless all of you in your labour of love in 2013!

Blesspiluck Ang
Bukit Mertajam

THE PLAIN TRUTH is very informative and enlightening. It reveals about the goodness of God, the sacrifice of Jesus, about human life, etc. Thanks to you and your staff for the hard work and sacrifice in compiling and sending this magazine to so many people. Please accept a small donation of RM100.

Sam Ch'ng

Penang

Ed: Thanks for the compliment. Participating in Jesus' ministry is more fun than work. It is Jesus who is doing the work through weak human vessels like us.

THE PLAIN TRUTH covers lots of subjects and assures us that God loves us and is always available. I am an old lady, a pensioner reaching nearly 70 years old. Enclosed is a cheque for RM100. God bless you all.

Judy Huang
Johor Bharu

Ed.: We gratefully acknowledge all your contributions to THE PLAIN TRUTH. Sure, they go a long way in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with the community around us. Thanks for choosing to participate in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

As in other issues, all the articles in the Dec–Jan 2013 issue are uplifting and inspiring. I was especially moved by the article "The best Christmas gift" by Takalani Musekwa. In the busyness of our lives, we sometimes forget that God has given us his greatest gift—Jesus Christ.

Jayashree
Damansara Utama

I wish to say that THE PLAIN TRUTH is always a welcome magazine at my home. It is spiritually uplifting, always enlightening in developing one's faith. I look forward to receiving it regularly.

Matthew Wong
Shah Alam

THE PLAIN TRUTH reinforces my belief in the truth of the gospel. I would be most grateful if you could enlighten me on this very important issue concerning the life of Jesus. His teaching ministry was only for 3 years (from 30 to 33 years). The Bible is silent on His life from 13 to 29 years. I have had no satisfactory answer from fellow Christians on this matter. I hope your magazine could enlighten us on this.

Dr Mildred Kulasekaran
Seremban

Ed: As our understanding comes mostly from the Bible, we too have very little knowledge about Jesus' life between ages 13 and 29. I suppose that it is not all that important for our salvation. If it was, the Holy Spirit would have surely inspired the apostles to record it.

THE PLAIN TRUTH is thought provoking, interesting and helps me to understand Christianity better.

Eugene Abraham
Puchong

I find THE PLAIN TRUTH articles very encouraging. It deepens my knowledge of the Bible. I like to make an annual contribution towards the printing cost.

Peter Tham
Shah Alam

THE PLAIN TRUTH is plain and simple to understand. I find it very useful and interesting as I am a Catholic sharing the same faith, which is eternal life as free gift from God. Continue your good work and may God bless you all.

Lawrence Chong Kian Tek
Klang

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. Donations should be sent to the addresses listed on page 3 or sent electronically to the bank account:

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We welcome your comments. Letters for this section should be addressed to: "Letters to the Editor", The Plain Truth, P.O. Box 2043, Pusat Bisnes Bukit Raja, Pos Malaysia Bhd., 40800 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia. or sent via electronic mail to: ptasiamy@gmail.com The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity and space.

Celebrating our differences

How can dad and mom say so many bad things to one another? I love them both. I wish they would stop fighting.'

These may be the unspoken thoughts of children as they watch their parents clash over difference of opinion from time to time.

While sporadic disagreements may be generally regarded as what

normally occurs in a healthy family, one cannot help but reflect on the more disturbing happenings of people colliding all around us on a daily basis. Conflict within families and communities, in the workplace, political arena, along racial or ethnic lines, competing interests in industry, civil wars and territorial battles scream at us in headline news every day. Brewing underlying tensions can escalate out of control and reach flashpoint in no time creating fear, insecurity and uneasiness in the psyche of peoples, organisations and nations. Yet, we somehow think of our generation as being the most advanced civilisation in history. What a paradox!

What about your world? Do you find yourself on a collision course with specific individuals, groups or organisations? Perhaps, your marriage is not what it should be or you are at loggerheads with your employer or what was once a good relationship is becoming troublesome. Naturally, we cannot deal with all the issues concerning conflict in one article. However, I would like to share a few thoughts that will help you make a difference as you interact with people in your environment.

A gift to be valued

Firstly, it is important to realise that conflict is normal and will occur because we are all so uniquely different; emotionally, mentally, physically and psychologically. We need to understand that diversity is not a problem to be solved but a gift to be valued. Communicating and listening with empathy to the wisdom in our differences is what makes life and relationships

by
**Bob
Klynsmith**

fulfilling, if we allow it.

Embracing others for who they are; their background, their talents, their culture, their experiences, their personalities and the perspectives they bring to the table, enriches the quality of our relationships in an extraordinarily meaningful way.

The late Stephen Covey emphasised in his book

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, "The person who is truly effective has the humility and reverence to recognise his own perceptual limitations and to appreciate the rich resources available through interaction with the hearts and minds of other human beings. That person values the differences because those differences add to his knowledge, to his understanding of reality."

We learn from one another as we consider how the interface of our thoughts with the thoughts of others often results in thoughts we would never have had... none of us is as smart as all of us. True learning occurs when problems are approached from many perspectives.

Responding to conflict in the right attitude through healthy dialogue will often lead to real answers as well as deeper more lasting relationships.

Two very different cultures

We have an interesting story of how God brought Peter and Cornelius together in the book of Acts chapter 10:28, two very different people from totally diverse cultures. Cornelius was a gentile centurion of the Roman army who considered Jewish customs such as circumcision, animal sacrifices and dietary laws to be very strange. Peter, being a Jew, regarded gentiles as common or unclean because of their eating habits and materialistic lifestyle. These two very different cultures came together in harmony, accepting one another in the presence of the Holy Spirit as Peter exclaimed in Acts 10:28 "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with gentiles or visit them. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone



impure or unclean.”

Jesus demonstrated his love for diversity among all people throughout His ministry. He recognised the dignity of every individual whether Jew, Samaritan, Canaanite or Greek. He also mixed easily with publicans and sinners providing them with the opportunity to view life differently through the unconditional grace of a loving God who cared for them. We read in John chapter 4 about the wonderful way in which Jesus touched the life of the Samaritan woman at the well. She was despised by the so called “superior” Jewish community for her race, religion, gender and sin. In fact, it was considered anathema for a Jew, to be seen eating or drinking publicly with a Samaritan. Yet, she was astonished when Jesus, being a Jew, asked her to give him a drink of water.

People and relationships would be dull and dreary if they were all exactly the same, just like eating the same food every day would be boring. Imagine if you married a person who was just like you in every way. Marriage is one of the most intimate of relationships, bringing two different people together under the same roof for a lifetime. And the dynamics change when children come along. Sharp differences in opinions, perspectives and lifestyle come as part of the package. I have enjoyed the wonderful blessing of being married for 30 years, yet our relationship continues to be an incredible journey of discovery. Sure it takes commitment, balance and ongoing effort to talk through and work out how to deal with our differences, while understanding the need to give each other the space to be who we are as individuals... enjoying the diversity within the relationship.

May I suggest that one of the most powerful ways in which you can enhance healthy relationships, whether at home or at work or in community, is giving each person in a relationship the freedom to express himself or herself fully as an individual. Naturally, this calls for empathetic listening and responding in a spirit of maturity and reconciliation to one another’s needs.

The rainbow nation

Jesus Christ came to reconcile humankind to God. As we enjoy the spirit of harmony with the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit, so we need to extend the depth of his love and grace to the people we interact with in our daily lives, celebrating and enjoying the wonderful diversity within our beloved nation. Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu encouraged the celebration of our South African diversity in 1994, calling it the rainbow nation.

However, this kind of peace can only be achieved by letting go of the racial prejudices, biases, discrimination and stereotyped thinking that may be deeply ingrained in our hearts, perhaps due to our upbringing or exposure to any number of unfortunate experiences and influences of the past. We all carry these blind spots in one way or another and need to call on the Holy Spirit to inspire us to rise above such deplorable traits. Understanding the common destiny and potential opportunity every human being has to enjoy an intimate relationship with the Triune God, brings a whole new perspective on how we treat one another. Notice Acts 17:26: “God made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth.” It is amazing to consider the impact of how our vast differences coming together magnificently in the

unity of being ‘one in Christ’ and his indwelling, will result in a peace accord that is far more powerful than the greatest of differences. Unity in Diversity!

Sadly, even at this stage of our democracy we continue to hear shocking stories of racial prejudice and bias. Yet, I also come across many ordinary South Africans who cherish and enjoy the incredible diversity that surrounds us. Abilities and behaviours, both good and bad, know no racial, ethnic or gender bounds. The core issues of discrimination and prejudice lie in our human nature.

Renowned essayist and poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson noted: “Every man is my superior in some way in that I can learn from him.” Let’s extend the hand of friendship to one another in a genuine spirit of mutual respect, reconciliation and forgiveness, celebrating the unique diversity that lies within our rainbow nation. Philippians 2:3–4 tells us “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.”

I will conclude with a thought provoking poem written in the early years of the civil rights movement in America; it is a parable about the things that separate us and how the coldness in men’s hearts is a kind of death. The author, James Patrick Kinney, was born on March 16, 1923, in Cincinnati, Ohio. Think carefully as you read this poem and seriously ask yourself the question “What am I doing with the stick in my hand?”

The Cold Within

Six humans trapped by happenstance
In bleak and bitter cold.
Each one possessed a stick of wood
Or so the story’s told.
Their dying fire in need of logs
The first man held his back
For of the faces round the fire
He noticed one was black.
The next man looking ‘cross the way
Saw one not of his church
And couldn’t bring himself to give
The fire his stick of birch.
The third one sat in tattered clothes.
He gave his coat a hitch.
Why should his log be put to use
To warm the idle rich.
The rich man just sat back and thought
Of the wealth he had in store
And how to keep what he had earned
From the lazy shiftless poor.
The black man’s face bespoke revenge
As the fire passed from his sight.
For all he saw in his stick of wood
Was a chance to spite the white.
The last man of this forlorn group
Did nought except for gain.
Giving only to those who gave
Was how he played the game.
Their logs held tight in death’s still hands
Was proof of human sin.
They didn’t die from the cold without
They died from the cold within. ❏

An unexpected lesson

My wife, Sue, and I recently attended a different kind of church service, and we learned an unexpected lesson from an unexpected source.

Sue and I are happily ensconced in our local GCI congregation, but we like to visit other churches whenever we can. For many months, we had been seeing plastic temporary signs placed on street corners all over our side of town. The signs said, “Church For the Rest of Us” and pointed to a website for further information. We were intrigued.

We looked over their website and found out the church is designed for people struggling with addictions: drugs, anger, bad sex, depression, eating disorders, alcohol, you name it. This is a church founded by, pastored by and mainly attended by addicts and homeless people. I guess these societal outcasts could be called “the rest of us.”

They met for services on Saturday evening, and we decided to check it out. We parked our car and began walking toward the meeting place—a somewhat rundown former movie theater. We didn’t see any smiling, energetic parking lot attendants nor any neat-and-tidy greeters outside the doors. Instead, there was an assortment of much-tattooed, rough-looking men and women with unkempt hair and ill-fitting clothes sitting on the curb, leaning against posts and smoking cigarettes. Eyes with dark bags stared at us “normal people,” wondering why we were there. We began to wonder the same thing.

Stepping around the bodies and through the thick haze of cigarette smoke, we entered the building and were greeted by two smiling women. We found out later one of them was the pastor’s wife. They asked our names, told us theirs, and handed us a printed bulletin for the upcoming church service. As we made our way down the hall to the sanctuary, several other people greeted us cheerfully. It wasn’t difficult to find a place to sit. It was ten minutes before services were to begin and we were the only congregants in the room. Most of the rest were still outside smoking.

On the simple stage, Levi, the worship leader/guitarist was practicing his songs. There was no multi-piece band, no choir, no backup singers, no piano, no organ—just Levi, his guitar and lyrics projected onto a screen. Simple, minimal, real. Kind of peaceful.

Then people began to come into the sanctuary. First,

by
Lee Berger

workers checking on the status of various aspects of preparation for church services. They all made it a point to come over to where Sue and I were sitting, in the middle of a row in the middle of the hall, introduce themselves and welcome us. As the rest of the members came in, several more went out of their

way to say hello, shake our hands and share a smile. I’ve visited many “normal” churches of various denominations over the decades, and I’ve never been greeted by as many friendly people as at this church for “misfits.”

The service began. The music was meaningful, the sermon was biblical and helpful, and I knew God was present. I spent time looking around and imagining what powerful and discouraging addictions pulled at these men and women made in God’s image. It wasn’t hard to see they have gone through some rough times in their lives. Some are in various stages of “recovery,” and some are probably still high or drunk or mired in immoral behavior—even as they gather for church services. But there was a refreshing openness and authenticity among the group, and I can imagine Jesus would feel comfortable hanging out with them.

The people I worshiped with that night have little in the way of material goods; some live on the streets or under bridges and carry all their possessions in backpacks or sacks. I guess that’s why I was so shocked by an announcement made

near the close of services. “Remember to bring your canned or boxed goods next week for the food drive. In a month, we’ll take our donated food and present it to those in the community who are in need.”

What kind of crazy talk was this? Homeless people and addicts donating food to others “in need?!” Who could have more “needs” than these people sitting in this church? Surely they should keep what little they had, not give it away to others. But they were being taught from the Bible about the heart of God, and God’s heart leads us to give and share—not always from our abundance, but even from our scarcity.

I learned an unexpected lesson that evening—a humbling and inspiring lesson—surrounded by a group of social outcasts excited to be on mission with God. What an amazing picture of the heart of God in outreach toward others! □



Ancient words changing me changing you

I don't remember the name of the movie. I can't recall the plot or the names of the actors. But I do remember one particular scene.

The hero had escaped from a World War Two prisoner of war camp. Being hotly pursued by soldiers he fled into a nearby village. Desperately looking for a place to hide he darted into a crowded theatre and found a seat. Within minutes four or five prison guards entered the theatre and began closing off the side exits. His mind raced. Now there would only be one way out and he knew he would be recognized when the patrons slowly filed out. Suddenly he had an idea. He leaped up in the semi dark theatre pointing and screaming; "Fire! Fire! Fire!" The crowd panicked and surged towards the exits. The hero seized the opportunity and mingling with the thronging crowd slipped past the guards and escaped into the night.

I remember that scene for one important reason.

Words have power

The book of Proverbs teaches us that words have power to bring death and life.¹ Poorly chosen words can hurt, kill enthusiasm and hold people back. Well-chosen words can heal, encourage and offer hope. During the darkest days of the Second World War Winston Churchill's words, so skilfully crafted and so superbly delivered, lifted the spirits and restored the resilience of the beleaguered English people. It was said that he mobilized the English language and sent it into battle. Such is the power of words. They can change lives and situations.

If our human words have so much power, how much more the words of God? In Genesis we have the first recorded words of God. He spoke and out of nothing came light. Out of light came day. Then came sky... and earth. Can we even begin to grasp how he did that "just" with words? His final masterpiece was the creation of a man and a woman. Because they had been created in God's image and likeness, God could talk to them and they were able to reciprocate.

If God made us in such a way that we can receive his words wouldn't you expect to find his communication somewhere on earth today? Well, he does talk to us today. He could have chosen many different ways to communicate with us but he chose a book—the Bible. The Bible is God's words to us.

The apostle Paul wrote; All Scripture is God-breathed.² The Bible is not just any book. It has divine origins—the words within are "God-breathed." It's not just words from inspired men writing an inspiring book. When we speak to others, they are actually listening to our breath. Our voice is really breath coming up over our vocal cords, vibrating those vocal cords and coming out as sound. If we didn't have any breath, we wouldn't have a voice. So your breath is your word, your voice. God's words—in a sense—are God's very breath. God breathed into the scripture. When we read

by
Gordon Green

the Bible, God is speaking directly to us. You could call it God's love letter to us because he breathes out his words of love into our hearts. It's a personal letter—not just words written thousands of years ago.

In Romans 4:3 Paul asks, what does Scripture say? This may seem like an innocent question but the implications are life-changing. John Stott writes that the author's "quasi-personification of scripture as being able to speak indicates that he draws no distinction between what Scripture says and what God says through it." Furthermore, Paul's words are in the present tense "and in asking what it 'says', the apostle indicates that through the written text the living voice of God may be heard" (John Stott, *The Message of Romans* p.125).

Breathtaking! Overwhelming! Supernatural! The Bible is God's words through which he speaks to you today—in the very moment. He still speaks through what he has spoken. When we begin to grasp this how can we ever make the mistake of reading the Bible just because we have to or because it is the right thing to do? How can we ever again find the Bible boring?

Not a magic formula

Don't misunderstand. The Bible is not a book of magic. Some make the mistake of opening the Bible anywhere and reading just one verse and believe God is speaking to them. Some see the Bible as the key to becoming healthy or wealthy. Some see it as a crystal ball and use it as a tool for predicting the immediate future. Some use it to condemn people they don't like or as justification of their oppression on others. Some use the Bible to create a religion of rules rather than listening to its proclamation of the good news, grace for lost sinners.

Paul says a purpose of the scriptures is to "make us wise about salvation through faith in Jesus Christ".³ He was referring to the Old Testament (which points us to Jesus) but all of God's words are a means for us to encounter the person and ministry of Jesus Christ—how we can look to him and always rely on him. His words reveal to us who God is and who we are because of what Jesus has done for us. His words teach us things about ourselves that we can learn nowhere else; what we are like, what our potential is and where we came from. His words illuminate the true nature of life so that we don't go spending our whole lifetime trying to find out where the real life is.

Come to these words like a little child to receive what God has to say to you, humbly and teachably, and the Holy Spirit will inspire, guide and illuminate these precious truths. When you do, your life will never be the same again.

A travelling preacher was passing through the security check at an airport. It was before the days

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If I were God

Let's be perfectly honest—sometimes it's hard for me to understand God. He just doesn't make the decisions I would make if I were God. For example, if I were God I definitely would not give rain to mean, hateful farmers. Only good and fair farmers would get my rain. But the scripture says God sends rain on the just and the unjust.¹

If I were God, only bad people would die prematurely. Good people would live long, happy lives. But the scripture says sometimes God takes the righteous so they will escape the perils to come.²

If I were God, I would always let everyone know exactly what lies ahead. There would be no question about what I had in mind. It would all be cut and dried and easy to understand. But scripture says God only lets us see through a glass darkly.³

If I were God, there would be no suffering in this world. But God says this is not his world; it's Satan's world. Therefore he doesn't always intervene, so bad things happen that we can't understand.⁴

If I were God, Christians would not have trials. After all, they are trying to obey God and do what is right. But God says those who follow him will have trials.⁵

If I were God, we would all run the same race. But

by
**Barbara
Dahlgren**

scripture indicates each of us has a specific course to run, tailor-made for us. Our trials are for us, not for someone else.⁶

Fortunately for the world, I am not God. God has a distinct advantage over me. He knows everything and I don't. For me to judge the decisions God makes for

my life or the lives of others is folly because only God knows when we should get rain and when we shouldn't. Only he knows when we should live and when we should die. Only he knows when it would be in our best interest to have certain understanding and when it wouldn't. Only he knows which trials will produce the best results in our lives and which ones won't. Only he knows how to work in us so he is glorified.

You see, it's not about us;

it's about him! That's why we're told to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.⁷ I must admit this is not always easy for me to do, but it's a much better alternative than thinking I could do a better job than God. □



¹ Matthew 5:45

² Isaiah 57:1

³ 1 Corinthians 13:12

⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:4

⁵ 2 Timothy 3:12

⁶ Hebrews 12:1

⁷ Hebrew 12:2

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of electronic scanning, and the security official was rummaging about in his brief-case. He came across the black cardboard box which contained the preacher's Bible, and was curious to discover its contents. "What's in that box?" He asked suspiciously, and received the startling reply "Dynamite!"

¹ Proverbs 18:21

² 2 Timothy 3:16

³ 2 Timothy 3:15

What a fitting description of God's word—an explosive power. Powerful not because it is like a magic spell but because our loving God spoke these words and speaks them again. God wants to talk to you today—and he wrote his message in a book. □

Become a giant of faith

Do you want to have faith? Do you want to have faith that can move mountains?

Do you want to have faith that can raise the dead? Do you want a faith like that of David that can kill a giant? Maybe you have many giants in your life that you want to destroy? Most Christians do, including me. If you want to become a giant of faith, read on.

Often when Christians read Hebrews 11 they think that if only they could be like one of these giants of faith, they would be so happy. God would also be happy with them. This is because most Christians think that Hebrews 11 is written for us to know how we can also be like those giants of faith. But that is not the purpose of Hebrews 11. It is not even the purpose of the Old Testament. After listing all the men and women of faith in chapter 11 of Hebrews, the writer goes on to say, “since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”¹

Have you noticed what it says? Those giants of faith are called witnesses, but, witnesses of what? The answer lies in the words of Jesus in John 5:17. Here Jesus makes a claim that God is his father. It says the Jews became very angry and wanted to kill him for making this claim. Jesus then goes on to press his point that he is the son of God. Realizing that they do not believe him, he says to them that he has four witnesses who can prove that he is the son of God. He acknowledges that his own witness cannot be taken to be true. “If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true,” Jesus said.²

Jesus calls witnesses

So if Jesus can't bear witness of himself, who can? How do we know he is telling the truth? How do we know he is the Messiah? How do we know that his life, death and resurrection can save us? Well, he tells us where to look. Like a prosecutor who calls witnesses to verify a charge or claim that is being made, Jesus calls four witnesses.

Firstly, he calls on the testimony of John the Baptist as his witness.³ John said of Jesus, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”⁴ Then Jesus said, if you don't believe John, I have “a greater witness than John—my teachings and my miracles. They have been assigned to me by the Father, and they testify that the Father has sent me.” Some of them did not believe either John or Jesus' teachings and miracles. Therefore Jesus gave them a third witness. “The Father himself has also testified about me.”⁵ When Jesus was baptized at the Jordan River by John the Baptist, God said of Jesus, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Some of his listeners were not at the river that day, so they did not hear God say that. Lastly, Jesus gives them the ultimate witness,

by
**Takalani
Musekwa**

which they have access to.

If you were listening to Jesus that day, you may not have seen or known John the Baptist, you may have been skeptical of Jesus' teachings and miracles, you may not have heard the voice of God at the Jordan, but there would be no way of refuting the last witness. Who was the last witness? Listen to the words of Jesus, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”⁶ Yes, the scriptures bear witness to who Jesus is. But, what scriptures are these? When Jesus was speaking, these were the Old Testament scriptures. How do they do that? Jesus is never mentioned in the Old Testament.

As noted in the beginning, the events and characters in the Old Testament are witnesses.⁷ They are witnesses of Jesus. They were “shadows of the real thing, Christ himself.”⁸

What does all this have to do with you becoming a giant of faith? Well, everything! Let's turn to the classic story of David and Goliath. The story of how a young shepherd boy has so much faith that he brings a giant down with one stone. The story is found in 1 Samuel chapter 17. Many of us read this story and wonder why we can't have the faith of David. We think the story is recorded to teach us how to become like David, so that we too can believe in God, and kill our own giants.

In this story David does not represent us. We should not see ourselves as David. He, like the other witnesses in Hebrew 11, as indicated above, was a witness of Jesus, a shadow of Jesus. We are represented by the armies of Israel, who cowered before Goliath. Let me show you how. David was a shepherd, but he declares in Psalm 23 that the “Lord Is My Shepherd”. Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd.⁹ David was from Bethlehem, and Jesus was born in Bethlehem.¹⁰ David was sent by his Father Jesse to go to the battlefield, and Jesus said he was sent by the Father.

King Saul promised that the man who could kill Goliath could marry his daughter.¹¹ Jesus will marry the church when he returns. For 40 days, Goliath taunted the armies of Israel, and for 40 days Jesus fasted and was tempted by the devil in the wilderness.¹² David told Goliath, “I will strike you and take your head from you.” It was prophesied of Jesus in Genesis that he would crush the head of the serpent, the devil.¹³ Once Goliath was dead, the armies of Israel chased down the Philistines and killed many of them. The battle was already won when Goliath died.

We have no faith of our own

So it is with Christians. Jesus said “I have overcome the world.”¹⁴ The reality is that we do not have faith to face our giants, but Jesus does. He has faith for us. He has defeated the giants for us already. What is left for us is to chase down what is left of the enemy. We have no

¹ Hebrews. 12:1–2

² John 5:31

³ John 5:32–34

⁴ John 1:29, 36

⁵ John 5:37

⁶ John 5:39

⁷ Hebrews 12:1

⁸ Colossians 2:17

⁹ John 10:11

¹⁰ 1 Samuel 17:12

¹¹ 1 Samuel 17:25

¹² Matthew 4:1–11

¹³ Genesis 3:15

¹⁴ John 16:33

¹⁵ Hebrews 12:2

¹⁶ Galatians 2:20

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Priceless

What am I worth? That question rears its head from time to time in my life. Society tries to label my worth in many ways and I occasionally find I fall victim to its rule of measure. I get wrapped up in things and circumstances and think those things are determining my value to my family, to society, to my church and even to God.

But I'm not the car I drive. I'm not my job. I'm not my bank account or my investment portfolio. I'm not the house I live in or the furnishings inside it. I'm not the clothes I wear. These things are useful and often necessary, but they don't determine my worth.

It's not just the *things* that trip me up. It's the emotional stuff too. Again, I have to remind myself I'm not my problems. I'm not my frustrations. I'm not my disappointments. I'm not even my failures. These events force me to grow, but they're not a permanent state and they don't determine my worth. However, I do find they limit my thinking. My focus shifts to myself and I start thinking I can't measure up to being worth much to God.

In Romans 12:3–8, I read about many things God has given to all of us. We've been given a measure of faith. We each have different functions and together form one body (of Christ). Each member belongs to all the other members. We've all been given grace. We all have different gifts. We're all held responsible to use those gifts.

by
Sue Berger

That's God's perspective. We're each valuable, even critical, in the bigger scheme of things.

I ran across a good illustration of this issue of worth. Take a brand new, crisp \$20 bill. Fold it several times and make sharp creases in it. It's not as unblemished now as it was, but it's still worth \$20. Now wad it up in a tight little ball. What's it worth now? Drop it on the ground and grind it into the dirt with your shoe. Would you walk off and leave it there? No, you'd pick it up because it's still worth \$20. Run it through the washing

machine. It's still worth \$20. In fact, you can tear part of it off and throw it away and it's still worth \$20.

No matter how often I feel folded, creased, dropped, ground into the dirt or run through the wringer, I'm still worth the same to God. My value doesn't decrease. I'm still priceless to him.

In Romans 8:35–39, I read that nothing can separate me from the love of Christ. Nothing can affect my value and worth to God. No trouble, no hardship, no persecution. No house, no clothes, no car, no person, no failure, no disappointment—

nothing!

How can that be? It's because God set my value a long, long time ago. Before I existed God decided I was worth the sacrifice and death of Jesus Christ. That's what I'm worth. And so are you. It's done. The value has been set. Nothing can change it. Thank God! □



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faith of our own. Jesus is “the author and finisher of our faith.”¹⁵

Paul puts it this way, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the *faith of the son of God*, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”¹⁶

So, how do you become a giant of faith? By being in Christ. The giants of faith in Hebrews were witnesses and shadows of Jesus, who is the author and finisher of

our faith. Apart from Christ, we can do *nothing*! It was not David who killed Goliath. It was Christ! Humans don't even have faith the size of a mustard seed, which moves mountains. When Jesus said “if you have faith of a mustard seed,” he was sarcastically saying you have *no* faith. You don't become a giant of faith by doing something. You *are* already a giant of faith in Christ. He has already authored and finished your faith. Now go ahead and kill those Goliaths! □

Two Christian

All Christians believe and participate in Water Baptism and Holy Communion (also known as the Lord's Supper or Eucharist). They consider these two sacraments essential to their faith. Why?

This article explains their significance and why Christians participate in them.

But first let's explain the term *sacrament*. A sacrament is a *visible sign* of an *invisible reality*, an *outward sign* of an *inward reality*. It pictures something real and profound that the believer actually *experiences* it. It is *participating* in something real.

Water Baptism¹

When a person hears the Gospel and believes and accepts Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour, he seeks baptism. He confesses his sinful life and asks God to forgive him. He believes that Jesus' finished work on the cross is more than sufficient to settle all his sins. He surrenders his life and asks God to adopt him as His own beloved child and give him Christ's righteousness. The pastor/elder then baptises by immersing and raising him from the water. He lays hands on him and prays asking God to fill him with the Holy Spirit and guide him in his new life in Christ. He is now a child of God and part of the community of believers called the Church.

Baptism pictures several things:

It pictures *cleansing*—the *washing and removal of sin* and being set apart for a holy purpose as the verses below tell:

“And this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”²



by
**Dr. P.
Sellappan**

“But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”³

It is a *public testimony*—an *outward confession* of an *inward experience*. We stand before witnesses and pledge our allegiance and commitment to Jesus.

It pictures *repentance and change*—from *unbelief to belief, from ungodly life to Godly life*. It means to surrender, to give control of our lives over to Jesus. The apostle Peter exhorts us thus: “Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God, and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁴

It *identifies us with the Godhead*, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus commanded his disciples to “...go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”⁵

It identifies us with Christ—in his death, burial and resurrection. It pictures our *death, burial and resurrection* with Christ as the verses below suggest:

“In Him you were also circumcised...*having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through your faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.*”⁶

“We were therefore *buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*”⁷

Paul understood and expressed this reality in his life: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”⁸

Again, he writes:

“We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection.”⁹

“He died once to defeat sin, and now He lives for the glory of God. So you should consider yourselves dead to sin and able to live for the glory of God through Christ Jesus. Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to its lustful desires. Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning. Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God.”¹⁰

Baptism is a *one-time* event—it is not



n sacraments

to be repeated as we will see why shortly.

Holy Communion¹¹

In Communion, the believer eats a piece of unleavened bread and drinks a little wine (or grape juice). The bread pictures Jesus' beaten and broken body, given for our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual healing. It also pictures our new life in Christ. Jesus said, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."¹²

The wine pictures Jesus' blood shed for the forgiveness of our sin. His blood cleanses all our sins—past, present and future. It also pictures our new life and seals God's New Covenant promises to His church.

Together, the bread and the wine represent God's one total sacrifice—given for our healing, atonement and shared life with Christ.

We take Communion for several reasons:

It's a command. Jesus commanded us to remember *what he has done for us* in his life, death and resurrection and *what he has become for us (God-Man)*. Quoting Jesus, Paul writes, "This is My body, which is broken for you; *do this in remembrance of Me.*"¹³

It's a time of self-examination (not self-condemnation). It reminds us of our fallen condition and our need for Jesus. Paul writes, "A man ought to *examine himself* before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup."¹⁴

It proclaims Jesus' death and return. Paul writes: "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."¹⁵

It declares our participation in Jesus' resurrected life. His life becomes our life and we become members of one another. Paul writes: "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."¹⁶

While baptism is a *one-time* event, Communion is a *repeated* event—we observe it over and over throughout our life. Why?

A marriage picture

The sacraments of Baptism and Communion can be viewed as marriage rites. They reflect Jesus Christ's (Lamb's) marriage to his Church (the Bride). Baptism pictures the *wedding or marriage event* while Communion pictures the *married life*. We marry *once* but live our married or joint lives for a *long time*. That's why Baptism is a one-time event while Communion is a



forever experience.

In baptism, Jesus and his Bride *declare their unconditional love for one another, no matter what the cost. They pledge their love and commit themselves to each other, even if it involves death.* Jesus demonstrated this love by laying down his life for us. And we reciprocate his love by laying down our lives for him. That's what true love is. *True love between two parties starts by dying to self and living for the other.* This love frees us from self-preoccupation and enables us to freely love others. This *other-centred* love produces abundant life—God's kind of life. It produces a life full of love, joy, peace, assurance, freedom and passion.

In communion, Jesus and his Bride express their love for one another continuously. We cleave to him and he cleaves to us. We become one with him in heart, mind and spirit. He reveals to us his plans and purposes for us and we share and confide in him everything. The Holy Spirit, acting as the 'go-between' God, facilitates the communion. Jesus also shares his intimate relationship with the Father with us. So we too get to fellowship with the Father in the Spirit calling Him Abba Father. The Spirit unites us to be at one with Jesus and be at one with the Father.

Because Baptism and Communion have profound meaning, all Christians consider these sacraments essential to their faith. Baptism pictures Jesus' marriage to his Church while Communion pictures his married/shared life with the Church. He shares with us *everything* and we share with him *everything*. We live in him and he lives in us. We belong to him and he belongs to us. We become his 'bone of bones and flesh of flesh.'¹⁷ We truly become one with him, and through him, one with the Triune God. □

¹ Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:38, 16:33

² 1 Peter 3:21

³ 1 Corinthians 6:11

⁴ Acts 2:38

⁵ Matthew 28:19

⁶ Colossians 2:11–12

⁷ Romans 6:4

⁸ Galatians 2:20

⁹ Romans 6:4–5

¹⁰ Romans 6:10–13

¹¹ Matthew 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26

¹² John 6:51

¹³ 1 Corinthians 11:24

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:28

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:26

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:16–17

¹⁷ Genesis 2:23, Ephesians 5:31–32

Maranatha

This Aramaic word literally means “The Lord is coming.”

The church where my dad was a pastor held massive conferences over Easter in the 40s and 50s. They owned a conference venue where thousands of members camped out and attended services and shared Easter communion. On the grounds were three halls. One was called “sunshine corner,” and could take almost a thousand children. Then there was the young adults’ hall that was also used for prayer meetings. And then the “Tabernacle” that seated about 13,000 people on Good Friday with the side walls open like verandas.

The camp grounds were called Maranatha Park. There was a hype and expectation as people greeted one another with “Maranatha”

rather than “Hallo.” The songs we sang were about the return of Jesus Christ, like:

We’ll be caught up to meet him in the air.

We’ll be caught up his blessedness to share. Very soon he will come to take his people home. We’ll be caught up to meet him in the air.

There were many others in similar vein. That was in those days. The saying, Maranatha comes from 1 Corinthians 16:22. Paul used an Aramaic word to make a pronouncement that was probably meant to stir the expectations of the Corinthian believers. Other translations say “O Lord, come!” Many of the parables that Jesus told were about the return of the King or the Bridegroom. And the Bible concludes in Revelation 22:20 saying, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come quickly Lord.”

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians to encourage one another by the knowledge of how the Lord will return,

by
Eben Jacobs

descending from heaven with a shout and the voice of an archangel and the trumpet of God.¹

Sometimes I find myself looking at cumulus clouds with the sun behind lighting up the cloud, making a silver lining and casting brilliant rays from behind.



And I catch myself looking for Someone on a horse² as brilliant as the sun, and imagining the clouds around that specific One to be hosts of angels. I find myself yearning for that day.

But then I realise it’s too quiet. At Mount Sinai, God’s presence was enveloped in a cloud with thunder and lightning so fearsome that the Israelites fled and begged that Moses should speak to them rather than God. Therefore the return of Christ will not be a quiet affair. The whole world will know about it. Almighty God, with an energy that makes the splitting of

the atom seem like a puff, will be entering the physical domain of human life.

Could our love grow cold?

Since the mid 1900’s however, there seems to have been a paradigm shift. We now concentrate on the spiritual blessings here and now and more importantly, on relationships with God and people. We are constantly admonished to love one another. I get the feeling that we have entered the era of which Jesus said the love of many will grow cold. Is the Holy Spirit stirring the minds of believers to strengthen relationships and concentrate on loving God and one another at present?

It is not too difficult to see how the love of many has grown cold. We are living with the “me-first” factor. Self-indulgence is the order of the day and there is

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The Ragamuffin gospel

Brennan Manning begins his remarkable book on celebrating God's unconditional love for his creation revealed to us in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ and the church's proclamation of the gospel of grace with the following words:

The Ragamuffin Gospel was written with a specific reading audience in mind. This book is not for the super-spiritual. It is not for muscular Christians who have made John Wayne and not Jesus their hero. It is not for academicians who would imprison Jesus in the ivory tower of exegesis. It is not for noisy, feel-good folks who manipulate Christianity into a naked appeal to emotion. It is not for hooded mystics who want magic in their religion. It is not for Alleluia Christians who live only on the mountaintop and have never visited the valley of desolation. It is not for the fearless and tearless. It is not for red-hot zealots who boast with the rich young ruler of the gospels: "All these commandments I have kept from my youth." It is not for the complacent, hoisting over their shoulder a tote-bag of honors, diplomas and good works actually believing they have it made. It is not for legalists who would rather surrender control of their souls to rules than run the risk of living in union with Jesus....

The Ragamuffin Gospel was written for the bedraggled, beat-up, and burnt-out. It is for the sorely burdened who are still shifting the heavy suitcase from one hand to the other. It is for the wobbly and weak-kneed who know they don't have it altogether and are too proud to accept the handout of amazing grace. It is for inconsistent, unsteady disciples whose cheese is falling off their cracker. It is for poor, weak, sinful men and women with hereditary faults and limited talents. It is for earthen vessels who shuffle along on feet of clay.

by
**Brennan
Manning**

It is for the bent and the bruised who feel that their lives are a grave disappointment to God. It is for smart people who know they are stupid and honest disciples who admit they are scalawags.

Manning identifies a serious problem that many Christians struggle with—accepting grace in theory while denying it in their daily lives. He shows how many have come to view God as "an eternal, small-minded bookkeeper, tallying our failures and successes on a score sheet." The remedy for this enslaving misconception is also provided—simple honesty. God's grace is freely accessible to us by merely saying yes to his yes for us in Jesus Christ.

When we really believe that the incarnation and atonement took care of everything for us that stood against us, the burdens are lifted, and we are free to worship God in an internal relationship and enjoy his loving grace in full assurance and peace.

Manning relates through *The Ragamuffin Gospel* how difficult it is for humans to accept grace. It is not easy to wrap our minds around the fact that God loves us unconditionally. This book has been instrumental in liberating the minds of thousands from the unnecessary baggage imposed on them by the tyranny of legalism and performance-based thinking.

It is highly recommended for its clear presentation of Jesus' simple message of grace, offering genuine encouragement, hope and healing to all ragamuffins and any others who struggle with their real or imagined inadequacies. □

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such a lack of positive human relationships that special training courses are being given in how to live with one another. But the Holy Spirit is stirring the true leaders and theologians to teach us about the Triune God and that intimate relationship to be poured out in our hearts, so that the relationship between the children of God should be about unconditional love.

The question that comes to mind is whether this era of relationship development amongst believers is not perhaps the forerunner of the imminent return of Christ. The apostles constantly reminded the church to be ready for the return of Jesus. Yet 2,000 years later we are still waiting and some have lost interest saying, "where is the promise of His coming?" But then Peter continues in 2 Peter 3:8–10: "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as

some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."

Because of this expectation of the return of Jesus we should keep ourselves pure and ready and our lamps filled and trimmed. We may live 70, 80 or 90 years waiting, but we should be waiting as one who is expecting the King of kings and Lord of lords at any moment. You may die before his return but then you will wake up meeting him in the air. Live as one enjoying the multiple blessings of peace, assurance of salvation, your sins all forgiven, and many other benefits of salvation and redemption.

But live as a child of God, mindful of one thing. Maranatha! □

¹ 1 Thessalonians
4:16

² Revelation
19:11–14

Scripture:

The Christian church down through the ages has always regarded Scripture as indispensable for its worship, devotion and life. Its very existence is bound up with it. The church would not be what it is without it. Holy Scripture is part of the air it breathes and the food it eats.

I learned of the importance of the Bible as a young child and was encouraged and taught to read it and memorize it. I studied it both on my own and with others, and I'm very glad I did, now years later. The study of the Bible has always been an essential part of my ministry in serving others, whether it was teaching it, preaching from it, studying it with small groups of other Christians, or referring to it when counseling others. When I attended seminary my primary focus was the study and interpretation of Scripture. It was so important to me that I was willing to try to learn Hebrew and Greek to see if I could understand it better!

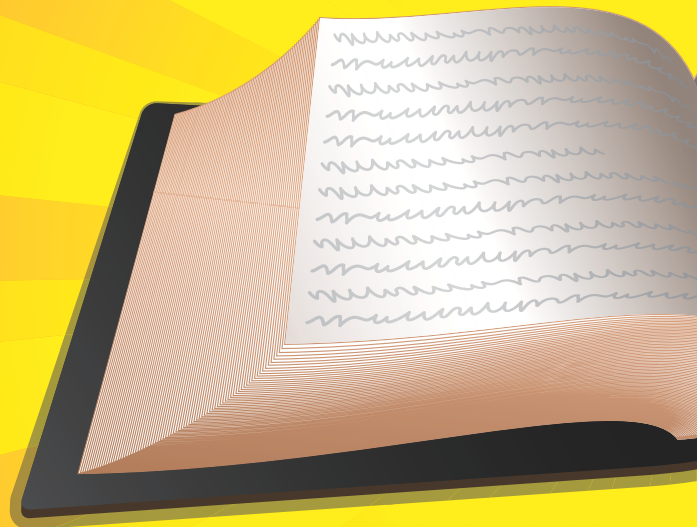
Along the way, I learned that there were various ways the nature and place of Scripture was understood and also a variety of ways to make use of it. Some of those explanations and ways of approaching Scripture seemed better than others. Some ways seemed to lead to the misuse of Scripture, or even make it irrelevant. I ended up reading books and taking courses to sort out these issues, hoping I could find some wisdom in all this not only to help me, but to pass on to others.

Scripture is so essential to the Christian faith that most every denomination of the church has some official statement about the importance and place of Scripture, and GCI is no exception. These summaries can be a good place to start reflection on the nature, purpose and right use of Scripture. GCI's statement is brief, to the point and fairly comprehensive: "The Holy Scriptures are by God's grace sanctified to serve as his inspired Word and faithful witness to Jesus Christ and the gospel. They are the fully reliable record of God's revelation to humanity culminating in his self-revelation in the incarnate Son. As such, Holy Scripture is foundational to the church and infallible in all matters of faith and salvation."

I'd like to explore with you what's behind this theological summary of our understanding of Scripture. We do so not so we can enter into endless debate or prove ourselves superior to other Christians who might have a different view. And I don't think we simply want a theory about it. We seek understanding of Scripture because we highly value it and want to honor and make proper use of it. We want to handle it well so we can get the most out of it. These things Holy Scripture itself encourages us to do.

We also can recall that others in church history have benefitted greatly through a deep understanding of Scripture and how to interpret it. But in the end, I think we want to grasp and use it well because we hope to get to know even better the God of the Bible in whom we put our faith.

by
Gary Deddo



God's gift



By God's grace

Many of us have sung the childhood song that says: "Jesus loves me, this I know—for the Bible tells me so." And that's true enough. However, there's a different way to sing that verse that is also true: "Jesus loves me this I know—so the Bible tells me so!" This second way is reflected in the GCI statement that the Bible is God's gift to us, a gift of grace and so of his love. Because God loves us in and through Christ, he has graciously provided us his written Word.

God didn't have to do so, but his love for us, his creatures, has moved him to provide us with his Word in written form. God's love for us comes first, then follows his provision of the Bible. We wouldn't be able to know and love God if God hadn't first loved us and communicated to us through his written Word. God gives us his Word in Scripture because he loves us and wants us to know that he does. We should always remember that the Bible is God's gracious gift of love to us.

God continues to empower his Word

But that's not the end of it. Human words in and of themselves don't have the capacity to reveal to us the truth and reality of God. Human words are just that, human. They derive primarily from our human experiences. But God is not a creature and can't be simply grasped in creaturely terms, concepts and idea. Words when referring to God don't mean exactly the same thing as when they refer to creation. We can say we "love" and we can say God "loves." But God's love far exceeds our love. We use the same word, but we don't mean the same thing when we use it of God compared to when we use it of ourselves. Yet our love can be a dim mirror image of God's love. So God has to sanctify, make holy and adequate, our mere human words so that we can use them to accurately and faithfully refer to the God of the Bible and not lead us into misunderstandings of God and his ways.

The God of the Bible is active and continually gracious to us by superintending our reading and interpretation of Scripture, helping us to see how they uniquely make God and his ways known to us. The God of Holy Scripture has not become mute since the Bible came into existence. This God continues to speak in and through his written Word, enabling it to refer to him and not just to creaturely ideas or realities. God continues to speak his Word to us through this gift of written revelation. If God ceased to be personally involved and stopped empowering the written Word to accomplish the miraculous feat of enabling us to know him, then God would not be truly known. We would simply have human and creaturely ideas about God to consider and nothing more. The result would likely be not much better than the ancient Greek and Roman mythological gods.

Inspired by the Spirit

If we ask, “How has God spoken and made himself known to us?” it turns out that this work involves the whole of God, that is, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The word “inspired” means “God breathed.” The Holy Spirit is identified as the wind or breath of God. By the Spirit of God, certain people down through the ages were called, appointed and specially enabled to speak authoritatively for God. They were “inbreathed” by the Spirit. How exactly the Spirit works we do not and cannot know. But we have been told that the Spirit can and has empowered first the prophets of the Old Testament and then the apostles of the New Testament.

The Spirit seems to take into account everything about a particular prophetic or apostolic author and graciously makes use of them. The Spirit incorporates their language, culture and social-political background as well as their own relationship with God into his communicative purposes. The Spirit uses the human elements of the selected prophets and apostles. But the Spirit uses these elements in a way that enables them to refer far beyond creaturely realities. The Spirit takes charge of them in a way that gives those words a capacity to communicate that they could never have on their own.

By the Spirit, the Scripture as a whole serves as a written form of communication that God can continually use to make himself and his ways known to his people down through the ages. If the Spirit was not at work with these individuals, we would not have any authoritative and trustworthy access to God’s word. So we can thank God for choosing certain individuals down through the ages and, by his Spirit, inspiring them to speak faithfully for him.

Providential preservation

We have these written words because they have somehow been preserved for us down through the ages. This too must be regarded as the gracious work and gift of God. Because of his great love for us, the God of the Bible not only kicked things off by selecting and inspiring certain individuals, but also by overseeing their writings being handed on and finally collected together. We call this form of God’s grace his providence.

Apparently an aspect of God’s providential oversight also included some inspired editing of preexisting materials. God providentially maintained contact with his written words and the process by which it was canonized (brought together in an authoritative collection). Of course if the God of the Bible wanted us to have a written witness to his Word, then we shouldn’t be surprised that God would also have to anticipate

and secure its preservation down through the ages.

The self-revelation

The gracious gift of revelation as it traces through history does reach a crucial high point. All the prophetic words prepare for and look forward to the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. All the apostolic writings look back to the time and place where God himself, as himself, reveals and interprets himself in and through Jesus Christ.

In Jesus, we don’t have simply another inspired word about God, but we have the Living Word of God himself, in person—in time and space and in flesh and blood. Jesus tells us that he is, himself, the Way, the Truth and the Life. He does not show us a way or tell us about the truth or give us things that lead to life. He himself is these things. Thus God’s gracious revelatory work reaches a qualitatively different level with the birth of the Word of God in human form. As it turns out, the written word of God’s Spirit-inspired prophets

and apostles point to the fulfillment of their own word with the coming of the Living Word.

John the Baptist, as the last of the prophets and representative of them all, serves as an authoritative witness when he points to Jesus as the light, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, the Messiah, the Son of God (John 1:8; 29–34). He (John) declares he is not the light, comes after Jesus, and must decrease—unlike Jesus, who is the light, who was before John was, who is the Lamb of God, who will baptize with the Spirit and so who must increase. Jesus, then, is

the center of God’s revelatory work and so stands at the very center of all of Scripture.

Faithful and infallible

The written Word derives its authority and faithfulness from the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit. Because God is the Living and speaking God, we have a written word that puts us in touch with the Living Word of God, all by the Spirit. The Bible’s authority is established and maintained by a living and real connection of God to the Bible. Scripture can serve as it does because it remains connected to the infallible God. The Bible does not have its own authority or faithfulness apart from God, but in actual and daily connection with the whole God, Father, Son/Word and Spirit. So when we read or listen to Scripture, we can expect to hear the living God speak to us once again. □

“We have these written words because they have somehow been preserved for us down through the ages. This too must be regarded as the gracious work and gift of God.”

The legacy of Ratu Epeli Kanaimawi

I have read of great men. I have seen documentaries of great men. But I've never met any until I met Ratu Epeli Kanaimawi. I first saw him as he arrived at church six years ago in mid 2006 together with his wife Sofi and his personal aide. Together they exuded the essence of the nation of Fiji as they arrived in their full national attire, truly a sight to behold. As Fiji's High Commissioner to Malaysia, His Excellency Ratu Epeli presented himself admirably to the congregation and his message for the day was enlightening. From then on he and his wife made regular trips to be with us in church and we truly enjoyed their company. Always humble, Ratu Epeli considered himself as a regular church member and he was most approachable. At that time he was always busy with his official duties and would have to leave soon after church service to attend various state functions.

Then Ratu Epeli's tenure as the High Commissioner of Fiji ended abruptly due to political changes in Fiji and he graciously stayed on in Malaysia to be part of the family of God's church here in Klang, Malaysia. It was then that I got to know the gem of a person that he was. He and his wife moved to an apartment in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur and began to associate with people here, being involved in church and making many personal friends both in church and the community where they stayed. Ratu Epeli had a unique ability to draw people to him. It was his engaging personality that automatically led people to trust him and consider him as their friend. His friends ranged from dignified statesmen as well as ordinary citizens including hired immigrant workers. He once emptied his pockets giving all the money he had to help an immigrant worker to be able to return home after the man had been laid off suddenly without getting paid.

Ratu Epeli and Sofi soon became personal friends of my family. Each time we met in church we would talk about many things but above all what impressed me the most was his deep and abiding love for Jesus Christ. Through his experiences in life, Ratu Epeli developed an outstanding faith in God and Jesus Christ. He was a servant of God in every sense of the word. He would often call me aside and tell me his vision for the churches in Malaysia. He said when he was serving in Fiji, there was a revival when church leaders and many chiefs decided to get together, to pray together and work together. That was the time he felt that the nation of Fiji flourished. He had the same vision for the churches in Malaysia. But he was not a man of mere words. He was a man of action, one who put God's word into practice. Who would believe that a man, who



by
**Devaraj
Ramoo**

carried the title of 'His Excellency' when he served his nation, would be driving church members to services in the church van every week? Who would believe that this man whose impressive resume shows him having served his nation as ambassador and a number of top level civil service appointments, would be working together with others packing 'The Plain Truth' magazine into envelopes and sending them to the post office to be mailed.

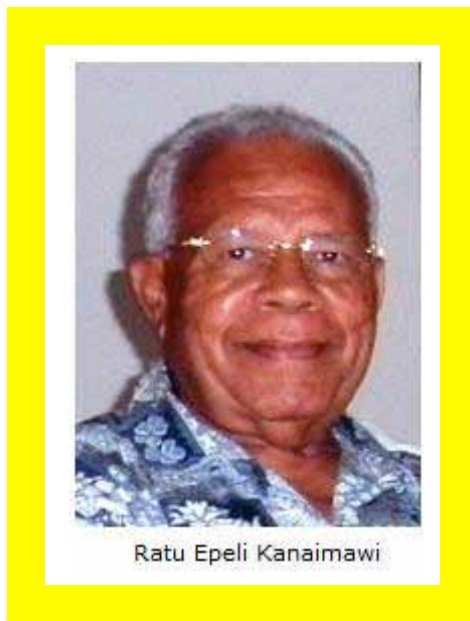
Ratu Epeli was filled with the Spirit of God. His joy was in serving God and his fellow man no matter who they were. He often spoke privately to me and told me that God had a purpose to send him to Malaysia. He wanted churches to come together, putting away petty differences and sharing the gifts of God given

to every church. He led the way when he volunteered to teach the youths and members of a neighborhood church in Kuala Lumpur. He very soon became good friends with the members and pastor of the church there, and helped begin the Bible classes for a Bible College. How soon he endeared himself to the youths and the members there!

In his own church, Grace Communion International, he was a pillar of outstanding wisdom. In the Men's Ministry of the Church he would give his opinion during discussions and it would truly make sense and showed his God-given wisdom. Never have I seen him angry. Never have I seen or heard him condemn anyone. If he had enemies, it was to their utter shame. Ratu Epeli never had any ill intent toward anyone. Perhaps his godliness was epitomized when he related how one evening as he was walking to his room, he had a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ, in all

His glory. The Lord appeared before him shining like the sun in full radiance, indicating that He was well pleased with him for the manner that he was serving Him.

When he became ill, he was spared any lingering suffering. In fact I was shocked how soon he succumbed to his illness. In the hospital he continued being his cheerful self, right up to the day he passed away. Ratu Epeli taught me to wait on the Lord. Psalm 27 was his favorite Psalm. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?"¹ One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple."² When I go to church I will feel a little emptiness there. My dear friend is no longer with us. How dearly I miss him. □



Ratu Epeli Kanaimawi

¹ Psalm 27:1

² Psalm 27:4

What's so special about Trinitarian theology

Learning more about the nature of God has dominated my Bible study for the last decade and I find it to be more and more fascinating. Having the correct perspective of who God is cannot be overestimated.

Viewing his sovereignty over eternity and the nature of his being orders all of our doctrinal understandings.

I love the following quote from Charles Haddon Spurgeon, England's best-known preacher for most of the second half of the nineteenth century:

"The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity."

I am sometimes asked, "What's so special about Trinitarian theology—don't most orthodox churches believe in the Trinity?" Yes, they do. In fact, belief in the Trinity is considered the hallmark of authentic Christian doctrine. It was our acceptance of the Trinity that brought our denomination "in out of the cold," allowing us to break free from being considered a cult.

As I studied what various churches believe about the Trinity, I observed that while most consent to the doctrine, it does not have a central role in their faith. Many consider the Trinity to be an abstract idea, of interest to theologians but not really of much use to the rest of us. This is sad because when the Trinity is not at the center, shaping all other doctrines, strange ideas and distortions arise. For example, those who proclaim a health/wealth/prosperity gospel tend to view God as a divine "vending machine." Others tend to view God as a mechanistic version of fate who has determined everything from before creation—including who will be saved and who will be damned. I find it particularly hard to accept a God who creates billions of people just for the purpose of condemning and damning them for eternity!

Trinitarian theology puts the Trinity at the center of all doctrinal understanding, influencing everything we believe and understand about God. As theologian Catherine LaCugna wrote in her book *God for Us*:

"The doctrine of the Trinity is, ultimately...a teaching



by
**Dr. Joseph
Tkach**

not about the abstract nature of God, nor about God in isolation from everything other than God, but a teaching about God's life with us and our life with each other. Trinitarian theology could be described as par excellence a theology of relationship, which explores the mysteries of love, relationship, personhood and communion within the framework of God's self-revelation in the person of Christ and the activity of the Spirit."

We know of this triune life of God from Jesus who is God's self-revelation in person. It should be our rule that anything we say about the Trinity must come from Jesus' life, teaching, death, resurrection, ascension and promised return.

I have seen many diagrams that attempt to explain the Trinity. The best of them fall short and some are confusing. It is, of course, impossible to explain the nature of God in a diagram. However, a good one can help us grasp some aspects of the doctrine. You may find helpful the diagram shown at left. It summarizes early church teaching, pointing out that correct biblical understanding concerning the nature of God upholds three essential beliefs about God. It also indicates that we end up denying that God is Triune when even one of these beliefs is rejected.

The three sides of the triangle in the diagram represent these three essential beliefs, and the point of the triangle across from each side represents the corresponding error when that particular belief is denied:

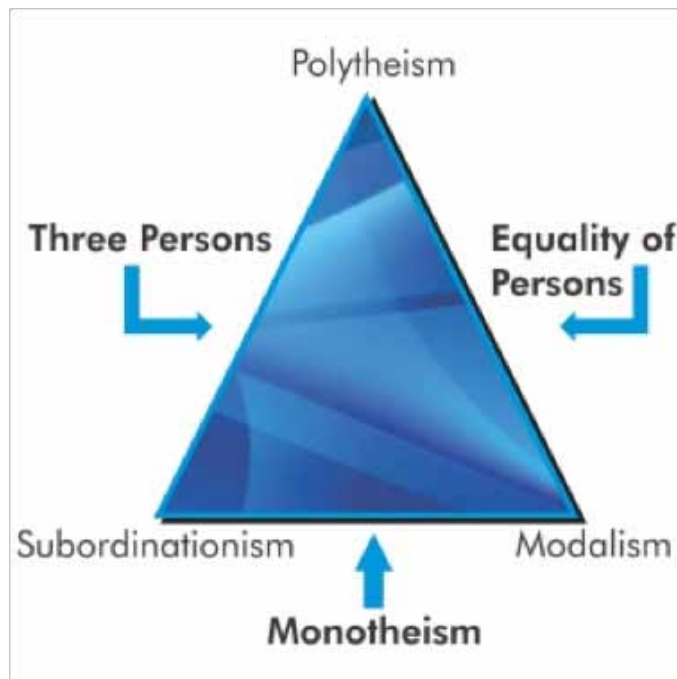
- Denial of the Three Persons

results in Modalism (sometimes referred to as the Oneness teaching), the erroneous belief that God appears to us in three ways or modes, wears three hats, acts in three different roles or just has three different names.

- Denial of the Equality of Persons results in Subordinationism, the erroneous belief that one of the divine Persons is less than fully and truly God.

- Denial of Monotheism (the idea of the Unity of God) results in Polytheism, the erroneous belief in two or more separate gods (including the error of tritheism—a belief in three gods).

When we are careful to uphold all three of these essential beliefs about God, we avoid the corresponding false teachings and thus bear faithful witness to the glorious mystery of the Trinity. □



A lesson from laundry

Laundry is one of those things you know you have to do, unless you can get someone else to do it for you! The clothes must be sorted—dark colors separate from the whites and lighter colors. (Some of us learn this the hard way, like I did in college: I put my new red gym clothes in with my whites and everything came out pink.) Some items have to be washed on the gentle cycle with a different detergent. And we all know what happens when you forget and put a delicate item in the dryer!

We take special care of our clothes, but we sometimes forget people need the same consideration. We don't have too much trouble with the obvious, such as illnesses, disabilities or difficult circumstances, but we can't see inside and know what people are thinking. That's when trouble comes.

It's so easy to look at someone and make judgments. The story of Samuel going out to anoint a new king from all of Jesse's many sons is a classic. Who would have thought God had David in mind? Even Samuel had to learn this lesson: "The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."¹

We have to be careful not to make assumptions with people we've just met, and even with ones we've known a long time. We don't know what they've experienced and have no idea how those experiences have affected them.

In Colossians 3:12–14, we are reminded of how we should treat one another: "Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony."

The New Testament has many "one another" statements, including Ephesians 4:31–32: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."

How we treat others is important for many reasons. As believers, we are part of the body of Christ. No one hates his or her own body, but cares for it.² We are made in the image of God, so when we mistreat or dishonor others, we are dishonoring God. The Golden Rule isn't a cliché. We need to treat others in the same way we would like to be treated, remembering we all have our personal struggles, some apparent to others, many hidden deep inside, known only to us and God.

Next time you're sorting laundry, take a moment to think of the people in your life and the special consideration each one needs. God already does this for us, treating us as individuals deserving of his own special care. □

by
Tammy Tkach



¹ 1 Samuel 16:7

² Ephesians 5:29

The Christian inheritance

Sometime in the future Jesus will return to the earth and establish His eternal kingdom. He will be the supreme ruler—King of kings and Lord of lords.¹ He will use His authority to lovingly guide and teach humanity to live in peace and prosperity.

This good news is expressed in various ways throughout Scripture. Another verse tells of the nations of the world going to Jerusalem to hear the word of the Lord. Still other verses tell of “living waters” and trees of healing to cure the ills of mankind.

Scripture also tells us that Jesus is the “heir of all things.”² He is more than worthy of this privilege. As the heavenly beings at God’s throne proclaim, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”³

The Apostle Paul tells us that Christians are to be “co-heirs” with Jesus.⁴ That is fascinating! What does it mean?

Co-heirs with Christ

“Listen, my dear brothers: has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?”⁵ In everything Jesus will always have the supremacy.⁶ But, He will share His all-encompassing inheritance with us. Scripture is clear about some blessings that lie in our future.

We will be given everlasting life. “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”⁷ Our bodies will have a total makeover that will last forever. No more aches and pains. No more visits to doctors or dentists. No more aging. Our minds and senses will be magnified.

We will receive a permanent dwelling place. Jesus told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them in His Father’s house.⁸ He was referring to the Holy City, described as shining like a precious jewel, radiant with light emanating from God, with a street of gold, and made glorious by the lack of sin. Revelation chapters 21 and 22 give a dazzling description of our future home.

We will be with Jesus. Paul tells us, “...we will be with the Lord forever.”⁹ As immortal beings, “...we will be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”¹⁰

We will be given a crown. Jesus will be King of kings and Lord of lords, wearing a crown with many diadems. Our crowns will be lesser, but they will



by
Paul Hailey

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”

indicate roles as kings and priests serving under Him—positions of service, and opportunities to get things done. “You have made them to be a kingdom of priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth.”¹¹

I’m reminded of a visit to the country of Jordan. We were taken on a tour to a facility for orphaned and handicapped boys. A gracious lady met us at the door, invited us in, served us coffee and cookies, and showed us around the building. She commented that she spent most of her time there—doing paperwork, cooking, washing clothes, and working with the children. Only later did we learn that she was the Crown Princess of Jordan. She, along with the rest of the royal family, was admired by the Jordanians because of her untiring dedication to the people. She understood the proper

use of authority—serving others. So it will be in God’s Kingdom. As Jesus’ servants, we will have the joy and privilege of helping others.

We will be rewarded for good works we do in this life, even little deeds of kindness. Jesus reminds us, “I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.”¹² He remembers every deed of

kindness as if we did it personally to Him.

Our coming inheritance is huge—surpassing anything in this life! Jesus will share “all things” with us! That should inspire and motivate us to love and serve our Lord.

We only get a glimpse

I have to admit that what you have just read falls short. Yes, the words are from Scripture, but the same Word of God tells us, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him, but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.”¹³ Another verse reminds us that we can only get a dim peek at our future.¹⁴ So we only get a glimpse of our future inheritance, but that glimpse is fascinating and ought to give us inner hope and joy.

My analysis is flawed for another reason. God is quoted as saying, “I am making everything new!”¹⁵ According to Peter, this makeover will include the heavens and the earth.¹⁶ Whatever God will make or remake, it will be glorious, surpassing anything we can see or imagine now.

So what can we conclude? Life with our Lord will be incredible, beyond our imagination, and beyond what we see and experience today on this earth. As Christians we have much to look forward to. □

¹ Revelation 19:16

² Hebrews 1:2

³ Revelation 4:11

⁴ Romans 8:17

⁵ James 2:5

⁶ Colossians 1:18

⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:51–53

⁸ John 14:2

⁹ 1 Thessalonians 4:17

¹⁰ 1 John 3:2

¹¹ Revelation 5:10

¹² Mark 9:41

¹³ 1 Corinthians 2:9,10

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:12

¹⁵ Revelation 21:5

¹⁶ 2 Peter 3:10,11

Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.

G. K. Chesterton

To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.

Karl Barth

Christianity is not primarily a moral code but a grace-laden mystery; it is not essentially a philosophy of love but a love affair; it is not keeping rules with clenched fists but receiving a gift with open hands.

Brennan Manning

There is too much tendency to attribute to God the evils that man does of his own free will.

Agatha Christie

The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment."

Dorothy Nevill

If an unsaved person were to suggest to you that he is trying hard to become a Christian, what would you tell him? You would probably make it clear to him that a person is not saved by trying, but becomes a child of God by trusting. You would tell him that there is absolutely nothing he can do to gain salvation. It has all already been done. Salvation is a gift to be received, not a reward to be earned. If a man tries even a little bit to gain salvation by his own works, he cannot possibly become a Christian. Paul said

about salvation: "And if by grace, then it is no longer works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work" (Romans 11:6). In other words, it has to be either grace or works. Christians are saved by grace and trying hard has absolutely nothing to do with it.

Steve McVey

No man should desire to be happy who is not at the same time holy. He

least remember this: it is your own doing, not God's. He begs you to leave the future to him, and mind the present."

George Macdonald

The Christian is called upon to be the partner of God in the work of the conversion of men.

William Barclay

Since teenagers are too old to do the things kids do and not old enough to do things adults do, they do things nobody else does.

Anonymous

thought and care that God be with you in everything you do. Have a good conscience, and God will defend you well.

Thomas a Kempis

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know one from the other.

Reinhold Niebuhr

It's the nature of God to make something out of nothing; therefore, when anyone is

nothing, God may yet make something of him.

Martin Luther

The church's core mission never changes, but how it's accomplished is up for revision.

Wayne Pohl

Flee for a little while thy occupations; hide thyself for a time from thy disturbing thoughts.

Cast aside now thy burdensome cares, and put away thy toilsome business. Yield room for some little time to God, and rest for a little time in him. Enter the inner chamber of thy mind; shut out all thoughts save that of God and such as can aid thee in seeking him. Speak now, my whole heart! Speak now to God, saying, "I seek thy face; thy face, Lord, will I seek."

Saint Anselm

A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.

Henry Gardiner Adams

Christians are supposed not merely to endure change, nor even to profit by it, but to cause it.

Harry Emerson Fosdick

All service ranks the same with God.

Robert Browning



We can't help everyone but everyone can help someone.

Ronald Reagan

should spend his efforts in seeking to know and do the will of God, leaving to Christ the matter of how happy he shall be.

A. W. Tozer

No man ever sank under the burden of the day. It is when tomorrow's burden is added to the burden of today that the weight is more than a man can bear. Never load yourself so. If you find yourself so loaded, at

Christ is not only a remedy for your weariness and trouble, but he will give you an abundance of the contrary, joy and delight.

Jonathan Edwards

It's not that we don't believe in God, we just have too many other things on our minds.

Robert Harold Schuller

Do not weigh highly who may be for you or against you. But take

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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