

THE Plain Truth

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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A paradoxical saviour

What can you make of a person who claims to be a saviour (messiah) but who hasn't solved the myriad problems facing humanity? Problems like wars, relationship breakdown, religious confusion, environmental damage, financial woes, poverty, sickness and death.

All through history humanity has been crying out for a saviour who would come and solve their problems and give them a good life. God heard their cries and sent a saviour in the person of his son Jesus Christ, but many didn't recognize him.

An unlikely saviour

They didn't recognize him because he didn't meet their criteria. They expected a saviour who would conquer nations, zap rebels, abolish false religions, fix the economy, eradicate poverty, make believers healthy, wealthy and powerful, and usher in a glorious kingdom. But that didn't happen—at least not as they had expected.

Jesus was born and bred in humble circumstances. Even as a baby he had to flee to a foreign country to escape being killed. He lived a very simple life and probably worked as a carpenter to support his younger siblings.

At 30, he entered the ministry. He preached the gospel and called on people to repent and believe his message (him). He mixed with Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, religious and irreligious, good and bad.

Although he performed many miracles like turning water into wine, calming storms, walking on water, feeding thousands with little food, casting out demons, healing the sick and raising the dead, he didn't really solve everyone's problems. For example, he didn't heal *all* the sick, eradicate poverty and corruption, overthrow the Roman government or convert masses.

Worse, when the religious authorities accused and condemned him, he didn't even retaliate. He gave in to their demands and died a violent and shameful death. What kind of saviour is he? He claimed to free people from all their woes but didn't.

Mystery revealed

There appears to be a mystery—paradox—surrounding his claim as the saviour of the world. What is this mystery?

Jesus warned his disciples that the religious authorities would accuse and condemn him to death. But he assured them that he would rise again. And sure enough, he rose and showed himself to them briefly, and then vanished.

by
Dr. P.
Sellappan

Two thousand years on, our problems still remain! Either he is lying or we are reading the scriptures wrongly. He cannot lie because he *is* the truth.¹ That means, we are not reading the scriptures correctly.

How has he solved our problems? He solved them by dying and rising! That's a strange way of solving. Surely, we will never recommend such a solution to anyone!

Jesus became human for our sake. Coming as our representative and substitute, he took our humanity into himself and redeemed it. He did that by his life, passion, death, resurrection and ascension.

He was baptized for us, died for us, rose and ascended for us. Assuming our sinful nature,² he overcame it by blood, sweat and tears.³ He was attacked at every turn by the devil, the religious authorities and the rulers, but he steadfastly resisted every temptation that was hurled at him. He overcame our sinful nature and thus reshaped us into his holy nature.⁴ He crucified the old man in us and raised us as new man. He did this *within* his incarnate self, as

a fellow human, and gave his *human life* to us as a free gift.

That's how he has solved our sin problem. How about the other problems? A saviour must not only save us from sin and death but also deliver us from *all* problems. How did he do that?

Several scriptures appear to predict terrible events before the end of this present age and the dawn of a new age.⁵ These include wars, false religions, famine, sickness, death, earthquakes, destruction of

ecosystems, heavenly signs, sun and moon not giving light and stars falling.

Many Christians interpret these as “end-time” events before Jesus' second coming. But such events have been happening in history all along! I believe the correct interpretation is: Jesus was painting, in broad strokes, what his death would bring about. *He was telling them (and us today) that he would drag the entire cosmos (including humanity) into his death and resurrection. The cosmos would die with him in his death and would be raised with him in his resurrection.* That's how it would be *recreated*.

Jesus is a paradox! His approach to solving problem is unconventional—it's alien; it's divine. He saves us and the cosmos by becoming a lowly servant, by becoming nothing, by becoming last, by losing, by dying, and by rising. Indeed, he is our paradoxical but a real saviour! □

“He saves us and the cosmos by becoming a lowly servant, by becoming nothing, by becoming last, by losing, by dying, and by rising.”

¹ John 14:6

² Romans 8:3

³ Hebrews 5:7

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:17

⁵ Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; Revelation 6, 8, 9, 15–18

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What our readers say:

THE PLAIN TRUTH gives an in-depth knowledge of what I seek. It definitely helps me as the various writers write about the mystery of God's plans and works.

Alfred Chin Hon Yin
Penanpang

It gives us true insight into Christianity. It is the best spiritual magazine I have come across so far.

Anthony Ang
Singapore

Some teachings in THE PLAIN TRUTH are provocative and it makes me think hard about my own belief. Even though I disagree with some of your 'truth', it does provide me with some insight and encourages me to seek the truth.

Donatus Justin
Keningau

Ed: The Bible exhorts us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). That means we must be willing to admit errors and embrace God's truth as he reveals to us. THE PLAIN TRUTH attempts to present the Gospel of Grace as accurately as possible but some readers may find our teaching radical. We trust the Holy Spirit to lead us to Christ who is the Truth.

THE PLAIN TRUTH has taught me to trust in the Holy Scriptures. I thank all the authors and staff of THE PLAIN TRUTH for your generous, helpful and enriching messages. Thank you.

Pauline Malini Navaratnam
Malacca

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps problematic students to be comforted, encouraged and supported with the word of God.

Lim Mei Lee
Kajang

When I encounter problems and stresses, reading the articles in THE PLAIN TRUTH gives me great strength and emotional support. It helps me deal with upheavals in my life with a positive attitude.

Subramaniam
Kuala Lumpur

Often, after a hard day's work, I am overwhelmed by the daily problems and stresses. However, reading the articles

in THE PLAIN TRUTH brings healing and releases my tension. Thank you for the problem-solving magazine.

Sally Sum
Port Kelang

THE PLAIN TRUTH encourages me in so many ways. It especially works together with the Word of God. Thanks to all those who labour to send this wonderful magazine. Keep up the good work and God bless you all.

Glory
Kuala Krai, Kelantan

Even as a decade-old Christian, your magazine is one of my spiritual foods. It widens my knowledge and uplifts every time I read your magazine. God's truth surely sets us free. It is indeed my pleasure to sow into the ministry. Please keep sending the magazine. Thank you and God bless.

Christine Chaang
Petaling Jaya

Thank you very much for sending THE PLAIN TRUTH magazine. I pray that more and more hearts in our nation will turn to Jesus Christ through the Gospel message that you have been proclaiming ever so zealously. The world needs him. Enclosed is a small love gift. You are always in my prayers. God bless you all.

Eric B. R.
Subang Jaya

Thank you for the good job that you are doing. Keep going. Enclosed please find a small contribution of RM100 to your great magazine. God bless.

Naidu
Sungai Petani

I hereby enclose a cheque for RM500 being contribution to THE PLAIN TRUTH. May God continue to bless the hands that are doing.

Datin Sri Chung Geok Siew
Klang

I find the articles very enriching. It has strengthened my faith and also helps me to be more aware of the happenings around me. I have banked in RM50.00 into your account—a small contribution towards the good work that you are doing.

Jessie Nathan
Ipoh

THE PLAIN TRUTH gives me spiritual knowledge and understanding to a lay person like me. Herewith is a cheque for RM50.00, being my contribution towards your fine magazine.

Daniel Balan
Sungei Petani

THE PLAIN TRUTH has enlightened me in many ways. It has brought me out from a tunnel of ignorance into the Lord's Love, Grace and Compassion. Thanks for a really great magazine. Enclosed is my contribution towards the furtherance of your mission in God's work.

Chia Thien Soon
Kemaman

Ed: Thank you for all your financial support and prayers for the Plain Truth ministry. It is a privilege to participate in Christ's ministry. He loves all people and wants us to share this Good News so that they too can fellowship with God and experience his love and grace.

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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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.

Radical love

The love of God is foolishness. ... Don't blame me for saying this; blame the apostle Paul. In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul said he was not there to preach signs to placate the Jews or to preach wisdom to placate the Greeks; he was there to preach Christ crucified. His message was "a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Gentiles."¹

From a human perspective, God's love simply does not make sense. "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing." To those who don't know that the cross is a message of God's love, it is foolish to believe God would save us by dying.

Indeed, God's love is unbelievable, it's preposterous, it's profound, it's radical.

From splendor to squalor

Think about it. You live in absolute perfection. You are the epitome of unity and communion. Your life is embodied by love, joy and peace, and you decide to radically alter everything.

I just described the beginning of creation, when Father, Son and Holy Spirit lived in perfect unity, in absolute communion. They are of one mind, one goal, one passion. Their existence is embodied by love, joy and peace.

And they decide to change everything by sharing all that they are with something not yet created. So they create humanity and call us the children of the Father. They created men and women, you and me, to enjoy relationship with them for eternity. But they created us with a caveat. They did not want to demand we behave a certain way in order to be in that relationship. They wanted us to choose to be in that relationship. So they gave us freedom of choice.

And because they gave us this choice, they knew most would choose poorly. So they created the plan. Not a back-up plan, not Plan B, but the plan. And this plan was for God the Son to become human and for God the human to go to the cross and die. That's foolishness, to most. That's radical love.

I recently visited a country in Asia where people worship literally hundreds of deities. Followers spend their lives trying to gain favor with these gods. They want to keep the gods happy so they won't be cursed. They spend their lives afraid they aren't doing enough. The idea that one of their gods would become human to help them, out of love, would seem absolutely foolish to them.

The Son, however, did not think it was foolish. It was a decision based on love. He loved us enough to throw off his robe of light and attach himself to the placenta of a young Jewish girl. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."² That seems a foolish thing for a God to do. That's radical love.

A friend of sinners

As a human, he lived with fishermen and tax

by
**Rick
Shallenberger**

collectors—the normal and the despised of society. He spent time with lepers, the demon possessed, and sinners. The religious leaders called him foolish. That's radical love.

In John 8 we read that when a woman caught in adultery was brought before him, the leaders wanted to stone her. But Jesus said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." They all left. And Jesus, the only one who was without sin, said, "I don't condemn you. Go and stop doing what you are doing." Foolishness to many. That's radical love.

Jesus ate in the homes of sinners. Foolishness, the religious leaders said, he's not keeping himself pure. Their sins will influence him. He will become like them. Radical love says, no; by loving sinners, they will become like Jesus.

Jesus—Son of God and Son of Man—allowed himself to be arrested, tortured and murdered so that by his shed blood we could be redeemed, forgiven and reconciled. He took all of our filth and foolishness upon himself and made us clean before our Papa/Father. That's radical love.

Then he was buried. On the third day he rose from the grave to move beyond giving us redemption, forgiveness and reconciliation. He rose from the grave to give us life. He told his disciples, "When I go I will return, and when I return I will be in you and you will be in me."³ That's crazy talk. That's radical love; that's radical life.

He then ascended to our Father and, because of "his great love with which he loved us,"—this "foolish" radical love—"even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"⁴ Yes, while still sinners—before we even had the chance to repent—God took us in and loved us.

This is radical love. It is in and through Jesus the Son of the Father that we are included. That same Father then placed us—with Jesus—at his right hand. Then that same Father invited us to participate in what he is doing—sharing that radical love and that radical life with others.

God's plan is foolishness to many. It's a plan of radical love.

Radical obedience

Notice how Eugene Peterson translated Philippians 2:5–11 in *The Message*:

"Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human!* Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special

privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.

“Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.”⁵

That’s *radical* love.

A living example

Jesus died for all humanity because of love that appears foolish. And he has invited us to participate in this love that sometimes makes no sense, but helps others understand radical love. Let me share one such example of radical love.

We have a ministry partner in Nepal—Deben Sam. Almost every week after church Deben goes to the village where we have a free medical clinic for the poorest of the poor in and around the brickyards of Kathmandu. Nearby, Deben has built a farm project for the churches and the orphans, and here is one area where Deben shares the gospel. A short time ago, Deben was robbed and severely beaten on his way home and accused of bringing false hope to the village. He was accused of bringing religious pollution—his message is considered foolishness to those who do not know the message of the cross.

Our ministry partner, who has since recovered, practices radical love. The very love God has asked us to share with all—even those whom we consider enemies. That’s how we lay down our lives for others.

Sharing the message of the cross—the message of God’s love—is sharing the experience of the radical, transforming love of Jesus. In fact, the whole of Christianity is based on love—the life-giving love of Jesus and his followers. It’s foolish love, and sometimes, humanly speaking, it simply doesn’t make sense. It’s not a love we know with our intellect, but with our hearts. It’s radical love.

Easter is about the love a Father has for all of his children—including those who don’t know they are his beloved. The Father gave his Son. His Son gave his life. He died for *all*. He rose from the grave for *all*. His love is for *all*—those who know him, those who don’t know him yet.

This is *radical* love. □



¹ 1 Corinthians 1:23

² John 1:14

³ John 14:20

⁴ Ephesians 2:4–6

⁵ Philippians 2:9–11

I have been taken; I've been rescued

A movie came out a few years ago entitled *Taken* that really made me think about my love for my children and God's love for all. The movie is about a father whose daughter goes to Europe with a friend and ends up "taken." She is abducted by a professional kidnapping ring that grabs unsuspecting victims and sells them into slavery. Every time I see this movie my heart leaps, and I feel the hair rise on the back of my neck.

I know this happens, and I can't imagine the terror the girl experiences and the fear and hopelessness the family goes through. Second, the story causes me some personal anxiety because my daughter is majoring in international studies and recently spent a semester in Argentina. She has also been to Spain and Ireland. She plans to travel a lot, and that makes me nervous at times.

So when I see the first part of the movie, where the daughter is on her cell phone with her father and he tells her, "They are going to take you," and then we hear his daughter screaming as she is pulled from under her bed, I just want to run to my daughter, no matter where she is, and grab her and hug her and confirm my love for her. I feel the pain this father is suffering—knowing his daughter is going through almost unbearable trauma of her own. Of course the rest of the movie is about the father rescuing his daughter.

The movie always makes me focus on the primal urge I have to protect my children and to what lengths I would go to rescue one who was taken or in trouble. Just like the

father in the movie, I'd do just about anything humanly possible to save any of my children, and woe to anyone who stands in the way of my trying to protect them.

I also know that my love for my children—the love that doesn't let anything stand between us and our children—is from our heavenly Father. Our Papa/Father loves us so much he was not willing to let anything come between him and us. That "us" means you and me and every person ever created.

by
Tim Shipman

Taken into slavery

I haven't been taken by a professional kidnapping ring that wants to sell me into slavery, at least not in the literal sense. But truth be told, the enemy did all he could to kidnap humanity and sell us into slavery to our sins. Like the girl in the movie, we were all sold into darkness, and that darkness became a way of life. But God doesn't leave us in our darkness.

Our heavenly Father stopped at nothing to rescue us

from our darkness. He gave us his Son.¹ And the Son stopped at nothing to rescue us. He gave up his life. This season, which includes Lent, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter, is about our rescue from darkness. In his letter to the church in Galatia, Paul refers to God stopping at nothing for us. "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father."²

The Easter season reminds us that Jesus died for us because he loves us. He took all our darkness upon himself; he became our darkness and our sin,³ and he paid the ultimate penalty for sin—death. But the story doesn't end at his death. Jesus took our darkness so we could be reconciled to our Father, so we could be restored to right relationship with God. Jesus rose from the grave to embrace us and take us to the Father.⁴

Near the end of the movie, we see the father and daughter wrapped in a joyful and love-filled embrace. This is how I've always pictured the

embrace between my Father and me. I know I've been rescued, and I know he rescued me because of his love for me. I know Jesus gave his all for me because of the joy of bringing me out of darkness and into his glorious light.⁵ I was taken, but I've been rescued, and so have you. □



¹ John 3:16

² Galatians 1:3–4

³ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁴ Ephesians 2:4–6

⁵ Hebrews 12:2

Seeing red when you are green

The story goes that the devil was once crossing the Libyan desert when he came upon an area where some of his demons were tormenting a holy hermit.

The sainted man easily shook off their evil suggestions. The devil watched their failure, and then stepped forward to give them a lesson. “What you do is too obvious”, he said. “Permit me for one moment.” With that he whispered to the holy man, “Your brother has just been made Bishop of Alexandria.” A scowl of spiteful envy immediately clouded the serene face of the hermit. “That,” said the devil to his demons, “is the sort of thing I recommend.”

Envy. Augustine declared it to be “the great enemy of inner peace.” The poet Petrarch described it as “that which tortures the soul.” The apostle James wrote that “where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.”¹ And King Solomon? What did he have to say about the sinister forces of envy? Not too much—at first glance. But when we dig deeper we discover that we can’t fully understand Proverbs unless we consider envy because it is toxic to the lifestyle that Proverbs teaches. It infects friendships, families, churches, schools, the work place—and ourselves. Envy is not the way of the wise person!

Envy is the internal pain or distress we feel when someone has what we want. Envy and jealousy are often used interchangeably because they are close in meaning. But there is a difference. A helpful way to remember the difference is that jealousy has full hands and never wants them empty and envy has empty hands and wants them full. Interestingly, both words emerge in Scripture from the same Hebrew term *qanah*, which means “to be intensely red.” It is descriptive of one whose face is flushed as a sudden surge of blood announces the rush of emotion.

Destructive emotion

I am sure, like me, you’ve experienced a sudden surge of envy. A rival arrives on the scene and in my vulnerability and immaturity, I sense that I am no longer getting all the attention. I want the spotlight. I don’t have what you have. I want to be noticed. I should be number one. And when I’m not, there rises up inside of me this powerful, destructive passion.

An eagle was envious of another that could fly higher and faster than he could. One day the bird saw a hunter with a bow and arrow and said to him, “I wish you would bring down that eagle up there.” The man said he would if he had some feathers for his arrow. So the envious eagle pulled one out of his wing. The arrow was shot, but it didn’t quite reach the rival bird because he was flying too high. The eagle pulled out another feather, then another—until he had lost so many that he himself couldn’t fly. The hunter took advantage of the situation, turned around, and killed the helpless

by
Gordon Green

bird. When I am envious of others, the one I hurt the most is myself—which echoes Solomon’s words in Proverbs 14:30: “A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.”

Have you ever seen a wooden house that was condemned because it was infested with termites? The damage is often not visible and you and your family can happily live in your home without a care in the world - until your house collapses. Envy is like that. Most of the time it remains hidden in the crevices of our hearts and festers inside, robbing us of joy, inner peace and health. Everything may look fine on the surface but as we compare ourselves with others the destructive emotions of resentment and bitterness churn deep within. Then, without warning, envy surfaces in destructive outbursts of backbiting, criticism, belittling or bullying—even murder. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day were not seen as evil men or criminals. They were the pastors and Bible teachers of their day. They probably would have made good neighbours! But what caused them to have Jesus arrested and brutally murdered? Envy.²

What is the reason for envy?

We forget...Or we don’t know...Or we don’t believe... who we really are.

Not only are you created in God’s image. Not only are you valuable and accepted and unconditionally loved by God. Not only have you received every spiritual blessing to live a godly life³—you are unique. There is no one else like you! You are like your fingerprints—one of a kind. God knew what he was doing when he made you and has never had a person like you before and never will.

This truth should produce in us contentment and gratitude. Meditate on it. Grasp it. Believe it. Act on it. The truth will set you free! Free from your insecurities, doubts and the need for recognition. Free to be your wonderful unique self. Accept it and you will find rest. Rest in who God has made you. Rest in Jesus who is being his unique self through your unique self. Choosing to see yourself as you really are can powerfully affect your whole approach to life—and how you see others. We all have varying degrees of talents and spiritual gifts and skills and experiences. We all have different roles to play in our journey through life. This means I can serve you with my differences and I’m not threatened when you serve me. I don’t have to worry that you have something I don’t have. You have everything you need and so do I. You are an original—why try to be a copy? So let’s get on with it. Be who you are, thank God for who you are and praise him for what he has given you.

Open your hands. They are not empty. ☐

Reference

Charles R. Swindoll, *Living Beyond the Daily Grind*.

¹ James 3:16

² Matthew 27:18

³ 2 Peter 1:3;
Ephesians 1:3

Do it anyway

I marvel when I see my daughters work with their children. Once, when Sherisa instructed her son to do a certain task, he balked and told her he didn't want to. She didn't get upset like I probably would have. She just calmly and sweetly replied, "That's too bad. Life is full of things you will have to do that you don't want to do, but you will have to do them anyway." What a wonderful way to weave a life lesson into an everyday occurrence!

Do it anyway! What a concept! The Bible is full of instructions that I would rather not do. I struggle with all those "love one another" scriptures. I struggle with loving my neighbor as myself,¹ loving my enemies,² and even sometimes loving those closest to me.³

It's hard to love people who are self-centered, unappreciative and unreasonable. It's hard to love people who don't love you back. It's hard to love someone who is irrational, illogical or selfish. It's hard to love those who verbally attack you, put you down or spread unfounded rumors about you. However, the biblical instruction seems clear—love them anyway.

The "love chapter," 1 Corinthians 13, describes love as patient, kind, not envious, believing the best, enduring, not resentful, and so on. It doesn't say that love condones and accepts everything others do. Nor does it say that love lets people run roughshod over it, nor that it gives them everything they want. Love is not gullible.

At times, in other words, love is more of a choice than it is an emotion.

Nowhere is this more evident than with the sacrifice Jesus Christ made for us. God so loved the world that he gave his Son for us.⁴ Jesus so loved the world that he gave himself for us.⁵ His motive was love. But those he loved rejected him and killed him.

Was it easy for him? He said, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me..."⁶ It was an agonizing choice. Luke 22:44 says, "And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." It was agonizing, but he did it anyway. He loved us in spite of our selfishness, our lack of appreciation and our rejection.

We're unworthy of such love. But Jesus did it anyway—for you and for me. I'm so glad he did.

But he didn't just die for us; he rose for us, ascended for us, and through the Holy Spirit, he lives in us. And that makes all the difference.

It's still hard for us to love people who don't love us back, who are hurtful, unkind or cruel. But because Jesus in us does it anyway, we can, with him, do it anyway, too. □

by
**Barbara
Dahlgren**



- ¹ Mark 12:31
- ² Matthew 5:43, 44
- ³ Ephesians 5:25
- ⁴ John 3:16–17
- ⁵ John 10:18
- ⁶ Luke 22:42

Can you believe it?

Jesus died on a cross. So have many other people. But only one came back to life—Jesus. The early church announced the resurrection of Jesus, and it has been a key teaching of Christianity ever since.

But some people find it hard to believe. There must be some sort of mistake—either a mistake in the diagnosis of death or a mistake in thinking that the person is alive again.

Jesus knows that it's hard to believe—an incident with Thomas illustrates this and has a lesson for us as well.

In John 20, we are told that some disciples found that Jesus was no longer in his tomb. He soon appeared to Mary, and she told the other disciples about it. But one woman's word was not enough to convince them.

The disciples see Jesus¹

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’” We do not know exactly how Jesus got into the room on that Sunday evening, but John implies that it was in some supernatural way. Jesus could still do miracles.

He greeted them with peace, and “after he said this, he showed them his hands and side.” Apparently there were still holes in his hands and a spear wound in the side—although the wounds caused by scourging were presumably gone.

“The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.” They believed.

Authorized to preach²

Jesus repeated his greeting and then added, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” This is John's version of the Great Commission. Just as Jesus was sent to earth with a mission, so now this mission is given to the disciples.

Jesus had promised that he would not abandon the disciples—he would come to them in the form of “another advocate...the Spirit of truth.”³ Jesus fulfilled that promise: “And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

Some scholars think that Jesus was reissuing the promise and that it was not fulfilled until 50 days later, on the day of Pentecost.⁴ Others say the disciples received the Spirit at this time, and the Spirit came again in a visible way on the day of Pentecost. We do not need to resolve that question now, but we see here that Jesus was not a ghost, vision, or apparition—he was a living, breathing human being with a real body.

by
**Dr. Michael
Morrison**

Jesus described the results of their mission: “If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” Does this mean that God may want to forgive someone but will be thwarted by disciples who are not quite so gracious? No, Jesus is not giving the disciples the power to control what God can or cannot do.

Rather, he is speaking about what people *experience*. The context is the mission of the disciples: preaching the gospel. When the disciples preach forgiveness, people will experience forgiveness. When the disciples don't preach it, people will not have the joy of knowing they are forgiven. Jesus wants the disciples to announce forgiveness to all the people God forgives (and that, as we find out elsewhere in the Bible, includes everyone).

Thomas believes⁵

However, one disciple was absent from the Sunday evening gathering. “Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’”

But he was skeptical. He said, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” He wanted not just to see, but also to touch.

Jesus gave him what he wanted: “A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were

locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’

“Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’” Jesus not only appeared—he knew what Thomas had said a week earlier.

We do not know whether Thomas touched Jesus, but he responded with faith. “Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” Earlier, Thomas had called Jesus Lord;⁶ now he calls him God. As John tells us in the opening verse, “The Word was God.”⁷ John wants Thomas' response to be ours as well, that we accept Jesus as our Lord and our God.

Jesus himself moves the discussion to future believers, including us: “Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’” □

*“Unless I see the nail marks
in his hands and put my
finger where the nails were,
and put my hand into his side,
I will not believe.”*

¹ John 20:19–20

² John 20:21–23

³ John 14:16–18

⁴ Acts 2

⁵ John 20:24–29

⁶ John 14:5

⁷ John 1:1

Do I love God?

In our congregation we often sing a song which is one of my favourites. The first line begins, “Just let me say how much I love you...” It speaks of seeing Jesus face to face, of hearing his finest whisper, of finding him in the desert, of longing for him with all my heart. It’s definitely a “feel good” song, with beautiful, even passionate words, and a very singable tune.

But it sometimes gives me a twinge of conscience. Do I really love God? Can I truthfully whisper Amen after the last line? Yes, the Bible tells me in many places that he loves me. But do I love him? And if I do, how would I know?

In one of his appearances to the disciples after his resurrection, Jesus asked Peter this question three times. Characteristically, Peter got a bit impatient. “Lord you know all things. You know that I love you,” he answered.¹ That worked fine for Peter. He really did

know Jesus first hand. He had talked with him, argued with him, even defended him with a sword. He had seen and touched and heard Jesus.

But what about people like me, who have only known him through the written word? Is it possible to love someone you’ve never seen with your eyes and heard with your ears?

Many of us will remember the song from the movie *Fiddler on the Roof*. Tevye and Golde have five daughters, and two of them are begging for their approval to marry the men of their choice, rather than following the traditional practice of going along with the local matchmaker. When Tevye objects, they plead, “But I love him.” This gets the man wondering whether his wife loves him. “Do you love me?” he asks tentatively. Golde takes a deep breath and replies; “For 25 years I’ve washed your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned your house, given you children, milked the cow. After 25 years, why talk about love right now?” Tevye answers, “Yes, I know, but do you love me?” Again she lists all her daily activities and concludes with, “If that’s not love, what is?”

He appreciated all these things she did, but he wanted a confession of love, which in the end she did express.

by
Hilary Jacobs

How do we express love?

We all differ in temperament and personality, and we have many different ways of showing love. Some of us use words, others gifts and acts of kindness. But mostly we love to spend time with our loved ones. As parents we love our children. We talk to them, and talk about them to our friends. We are concerned about their lives and happiness.

My husband and I have our best conversations early in the morning after a good cup of coffee. And what do we talk about most of the time? About what we are currently studying in the Bible, about the meaning of certain scriptures, often about articles submitted for this magazine and quite frequently about the sermon we heard last week. And, come to think of it, often about our own attitudes and words, and how they stack up against God’s instruction.



When we talk with our closest friends, we find that our most enjoyable conversations are about God, encouraging each other in hard times. Often a point under discussion will have us poring over a certain verse in the Bible. We all did a bit of stargazing recently, and a particularly bright star turned out to be Venus, with Jupiter just “close by.” One of us just had to say “How

great is God and how small we are, and how wonderful that God even takes notice of us.”

Somehow, God seems to play a very important role in our lives. He infiltrates into all our activities. And didn’t Jesus say, “out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks?”

If Jesus should ask me, “Do you love me,” how could I answer? Could I say, “For 40 years I’ve read your word, prayed to you, gone to church, sung your praises, talked about you, served your people. I have even been considered a fool for you. If that’s not love, what is?”

And if he should ask the question again, as he did to Peter, what could I say? I guess it would be, “You know everything Lord. You know I love you.” □

¹ John 21:15–17

Trinity, incarnation

The doctrines of *trinity*, *incarnation* and *adoption* may appear abstract if not intimidating but they are important as they capture the essence of the Christian faith.

This article explains these doctrines in layman's language so that everyone reading it can understand what the Christian faith is all about.

Trinity

Trinity tells us that God is a *relationship* God. The triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is a *relational* being. They relate by giving themselves to each other in *self-emptying* love. Their relationship is intimate, wholesome, pure, vibrant, joyful and satisfying. God created us so that we might participate in their relationship.

Their relationship is not hierarchical. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are *coequal*. The Father is not superior to the Son and the Son is not superior to the Holy Spirit. The need for hierarchy doesn't arise because they simply give themselves to each other in *unconditional* love. God's kingdom (family) is not about personal power, position or status. It's about living in union and communion with one another as equals.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are *distinct* from each other. The Father is distinct from the Son in the sense that He is *the* Father of the Son. The Son is distinct from the Father in the sense that He is *the* Son of the Father. And the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son in the sense that He is *the* Spirit of the Father *and* the Son. In God's kingdom, *everyone* will be distinct. We will be distinct from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and also distinct from one another. It will *not* be a community of cloned people which will be dull and boring!

Although the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct they are nevertheless *united* and function as *one* being.¹ They do *everything* together even though one may take the lead. All their actions are *joint* actions—whether creation, reconciliation or salvation.² In God's kingdom we will all be united and function as one family.³ There will be unity in diversity.

God's love is *dynamic*. The Father loves the Son and *pours* himself into the Son. He adores, respects, honours, trusts and rejoices in the Son. He gives glory to the Son. The Son likewise loves the Father and pours himself into the Father. He adores, respects, honours, trusts and rejoices in the Father. He gives glory to the Father. They glorify each other in the Spirit.⁴ In God's kingdom, we too will glorify one another by giving respect, honour and praise.

Their life is an *open* book—completely *transparent*. The Father knows the Son *fully* in the Spirit and the Son knows the Father *fully* in the Spirit. They know each other intimately because the *same* Spirit dwells in them, and the Spirit knows the deep things of God.⁵ In God's kingdom we too will live transparently. We will have nothing to hide. It is sin that causes us to hide from each



by
Dr. P.
Sellappan

other but God's kingdom will have no sin.

The Father and Son *dwell* in each other in the Spirit. The Father dwells in the Son and the Son dwells in the Father. The apostle John expresses this *mutual indwelling* (*embrace*) thus: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me."⁶ That is, *they have their being in communion*. In God's kingdom, we too will have communion (fellowship) with God and with one another in the Spirit.⁷

Trinity is about relationships. It is about living in union and communion with God and with one another. It is about participating in Jesus' intimate relationship with his Father as his own brothers and sisters. It is about living a shared life. It is about using our talents and gifts creatively to edify one another.

God is drawing *all* people to himself through his son Jesus and by his Spirit. The Spirit leads us to Jesus and Jesus empowers us to participate in his relationship with the Father. God is inviting us to an intimate relationship with him and with one another. That's why we can call God 'Abba Father' and one another as *brothers and sisters*. We are called to a *filial* relationship.

Incarnation

Incarnation tells us that God became Man in the person of His Son.⁸ Jesus came *as one of us* and *continues* to live as a human (in *glorified* form) but without ceasing to be God.⁹ He became *the God-Man*—fully God and fully human within his one person. As God-Man, he came to *unite* God and man. As God, he extends his Father's unconditional love to us, and as Man he takes all our concerns and petitions to God. Thus, he has forged an *unbreakable* bond between God and man.¹⁰ *In Jesus, God has bound himself to humanity eternally—permanently*. That means humanity will *never* be alone. This is the purpose of incarnation.

The first Adam, representing all humanity, dragged us into sin. The last Adam, Jesus, also representing all humanity, lived a holy life *for us, on our behalf and with us as a human*. *You might say he came to relive our life for us because we failed to live a holy life*.

Jesus paid the penalty of our sin which is death. But he didn't stay dead. He rose from the grave to give us *his resurrection life and righteousness* as a free gift.¹¹ He ascended to heaven to give us the glory that he received from his Father. He is now at the right hand of God as a *perfect human* for us and on our behalf. Our lives are *inseparably* bound up in his life.¹² *He is our new (recreated) life*.¹³

God's kingdom is holy, so to enter it we too must be holy. But we are not. We are sinful and we are powerless to make ourselves holy. That's why Jesus came; that's why we need him. Jesus has *already* made us holy by giving us his sinless human life as a free gift. That's what makes us holy. As holy people, we can now joyfully fellowship with God and with one another.

tion, adoption



Adoption

Adoption is the process of taking someone's child and making him/her legally yours. The child was not yours previously, but by adopting, the child now becomes yours.

God created us and has included us in his life. *He created us for adoption as his own children.*¹⁴ He planned this a *long* time ago, before the foundation of the world, *before time began*. His desire is that we participate in his abundant life as his own children.

Adoption invariably involves some kind of *payment*. God paid a *ransom price* to redeem us from sin and death and from the devil. God knew humanity would sin given the freedom of choice and the presence of the devil. Humanity sinned and became slaves to sin. The devil held them captive and they were powerless to escape his tight grip. They needed a saviour. So God sent Jesus to deliver them from the devil, sin and death. Jesus paid the ransom (adoption) price, and once the price is paid the devil has no claim over them. He must release them as they now belong to God legally. That's how God has adopted us as his own children.

It is God's good pleasure to give us his kingdom. As adopted children we become heirs and coheirs with Jesus. We *inherit* all the rights and privileges accorded to Jesus. God shares *everything* with Jesus and Jesus shares *everything* with us. He shares all that he *is* (relationship with God, eternal life, power, glory, riches and wisdom) and *has* (the vast universe and all things in it). *Love means sharing everything*. That's how great God's love is.

God's love is *unconditional*; it has no bounds. He loves *all* people in *all* generations. He loves males and females, young and old, rich and poor. He loves all races, colours and characters. He loves them *equally*. He doesn't love some people more and others less (like we do). *He loves us as much as he loves his son Jesus*. His love for us doesn't depend on how good we are or how many good things we have done. *He loves us because he is love*.

Let's summarize: The doctrines of trinity, incarnation and adoption are core beliefs of the Christian faith. Trinity invites us to a *relationship* with God—to participate in the life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, to participate in that relationship we must first be *united* to God. This is the purpose of the incarnation. As God-Man, Jesus has forged our *union* with God and has given us his *perfect humanity* as a free gift.¹⁵ This union empowers us to participate in God's life. *Adoption assures us that we belong to God* and has adopted us as his *own* beloved children. *He wants real, bona fide children, born of the Spirit, not strangers*. These doctrines—trinity, incarnation and adoption—in a nutshell, are the essence of the Christian faith. May you embrace this truth and participate in God's abundant life—now and forever! □

¹ John 10:30

² Genesis 1:26;
Matthew 28:19;
John 3:16; John
5:17

³ Galatians 3:28

⁴ John 17:1–5

⁵ 1 Corinthians
2:10–11

⁶ John 14:11; John
17:21

⁷ John 14:20;
John 17:21–23;
Ephesians 2:22

⁸ John 1:14

⁹ 1 Corinthians
15:47–49;
1 Timothy 2:5;
Hebrews 7:6

¹⁰ Acts 17:28

¹¹ 1 Corinthians
1:30;
2 Corinthians
5:21

¹² Ephesians 4:6

¹³ 2 Corinthians
5:17

¹⁴ Ephesians 1:5;
Romans 8:15;
Galatians 4:5

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians
1:30

Is it moral fo

In his book *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins, a well-known atheist, vindictively describes God as a jealous butcher who kills men, women and children indiscriminately for the pettiest of reasons.

Furthermore he paints God out to be an unjust control freak, a racist and an ethnic cleanser amongst a number of other nasty things. He says these things with one clear question in mind... "Why would you serve such a terrible God?"

I believe the central issue to this debate is not whether God kills, because we all know he does, but rather whether it is moral/right for God to kill humans. If we can establish that it is moral for God to kill humans, then the manner and timing of such an act should not be a problem.

God is the author of morality

How do we know that murder, rape or child molestation is wrong? We know it because God has written a moral code into our very beings. Without a universal moral code we would have no way to judge what is right or wrong. Everything would then be relative.

God is the author of morality and decides what is wrong or right. It is therefore, as the moral law giver, God's right to decree that "You shall not murder,"¹ while reserving the right for himself to kill as a means to dispense justice.

In fact when we read the Old Testament we find that in certain cases, when the situation warrants it, God affords humans the responsibility to dispense justice, such as in the case of state sanctioned capital punishment.

The Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah and the Amalekites

This right of God to protect the continuation of society by killing wicked humans and to dispense justice saturates the Old Testament.

Noah's flood, for example is a classic case of God's judgment. In Genesis 6:11-13 we read, "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. So God said to Noah, 'I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.'" God then speaks to Noah and instructs him to build an ark for the coming flood. When we add to this information what we obtain in 2 Peter 2:5 and Hebrews 11:7, where Noah is described as a "preacher of righteousness" and someone who "condemned the world," we get a clear picture that the people surrounding Noah had fair warning of the impending judgment to come (some have suggested that the ark took anything between 50 to 100 years to complete). God did not decide to wipe out the world on a whim. It was a consequence of a society that had become terribly corrupt over a long period of time.

Sodom and Gomorrah is another classic example.

by
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These cities were destroyed in Genesis 19:24 by fire from heaven. Men, women and children were consumed by the flames. Once again they were not innocent. The society had become so corrupt that God needed to remove it in the interest of those around it and those to come. In Genesis 18:20 God declares... "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me." Abraham, who is present at that time, starts to bargain with God to spare the cities. He starts off by asking God if he will spare them if there are 50 righteous people and eventually bargains God down to sparing the cities for the sake of 10 righteous people, but alas, ten righteous people are not to be found.

Some might argue that when God bargained with Abraham in this manner he was taking human suffering lightly. I contend that God already knew the answer and was engaging in this barter with Abraham to show him the exact opposite. In other words, God was showing Abraham that he was prepared to spare the city for 10 righteous people but that Lot and his family were the only righteous ones left.

God then sends his angels into Sodom. When the men in the city find out about the angels they try to take them by force and rape them, but Lot (Abraham's cousin who lived in Sodom) offers his two virgin daughters to them instead. The men refuse the daughters and try to storm the house into which the angels had retreated. The angels strike the men blind, and rescue Lot and his family.

But Sodom and Gomorrah did not become corrupt overnight. In Genesis 13:13 we read, "Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD." There are many years (some have argued for as much as 25 years), that pass between this first introduction to the cities when Lot moved there, and when Abraham and Melchizedek, a high priest of God, and the King of Sodom, meet.

The example of the Amalekites is especially interesting. In this case God uses humans to dispense justice. The Amalekites were a warlike nation. They were hell-bent on destroying the Israelites and routinely allied themselves with other nations to wipe Israel off the face of the earth.² After Israel's exodus from Egypt their first military confrontation was with the Amalekites who had a nasty habit of attacking people who were lagging behind. The Amalekites were wiped out, but only after God had allowed them more than 400 years to change their ways.

Time and time again, killing humans is used to protect the on-going integrity of broader society and as a means of judgment. God never does anything in an arbitrary manner. It is just not in his nature.

Through these, and many, many more examples, we can see a pattern emerge:

People do really bad things.

r God to kill?



Most times, only when things get beyond the point of no return, God acts.

God gives the people opportunity to repent. Either through long periods of exposure to the truth or by direct warning (for example, Jonah to Nineveh, the prophets to Israel, Judah and the other nations).

God delivers judgment if people do not change.

Our physical bodies are destined to die

For most humans their eventual death will not be as a direct result of God killing them. Unlike the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the vast majority of humanity will die due to natural disaster, sickness, war, famine and malnutrition or a host of other reasons, or simply, due to old age. Not because God is sitting in a cloud firing off lightning bolts at them.

An earthquake or a tsunami does not necessarily come about because God wants to punish people, but rather because of pressure building in the earth's crust or tectonic plates pushing against each other. Natural disasters where people die are a result of the curse of Genesis 3:17, not particularly because of their sins.

Many people die because of the choices that other people make, for example in cases of murder or war. But this is nothing new; God has

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The cutting edge

Is it just me, or do you also tend to judge a book by its cover?

Of course I'm not talking about real books, but about people, and their covers can be anything from what they wear to what they say or do.

Something happened to me many years ago when I was still at primary school, which I have never forgotten. Although I don't always seem to remember the lesson I learnt that day. The story is quite embarrassing, but I'll tell it anyway.

I enjoyed woodwork classes in primary school and one day my parents bought me a brand new wood-chisel. The plastic handle was bright red and the steel shaft was extra shiny with a beautiful sharp cutting edge. I felt so proud that day when I took it out in the workshop for the first time and showed it to all the other children. No more using those old, brown wooden-handled, blunt and rusty bladed chisels of the school. Every week I eagerly looked forward to woodwork classes. I noticed that one boy in particular really liked my super chisel. I can still see his face and remember his name - Clayton. He was quite friendly, but I would have to keep an eye on him.

Then one day the worst of things happened. It had been a wonderful day of woodwork class – my chisel and me. But when I got home I discovered to my utter horror that my chisel wasn't in my bag. I had put it in there after class and someone must have stolen it. Of course I had my immediate list of suspects. There was that one quiet boy who never spoke to anyone – it was probably him.

Then there was ... wait a minute! There was Clayton, who had been far too interested in my chisel. He must have stolen it. The next day I eagerly asked some of the children in class if they had seen my wood-chisel. No one had. I cautiously interrogated my chief suspect (Clayton), but he simply said no and changed the subject. I was devastated.

Flaunting it

Try to imagine how I must have felt the next woodwork class, when still mourning the loss of my shiny, super sharp, red-handled chisel, Clayton proudly pulled out a red-handled steel shaft chisel to show everyone. I quickly asked him where he had got this wood-chisel. To which he replied that he had found it in amongst his father's tools in their garage. I could not believe his audacity. Not only did he steal my chisel but he had the gall to flaunt it all around in woodwork class. Oh

by
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Maree**

sure, he had disguised it a bit by cutting marks into the plastic handle and splashing some white paint all over it, but it was mine.

Judging a book by its cover is one thing, but I had all the evidence to go along with the cover. I was determined to get my chisel back and the opportunity presented itself when, during the last lesson of the day, I sat behind Clayton in class. I carefully opened his school bag and took back what was rightfully mine. Justice had been done and I was feeling on top of the world that day when I walked home from school. Of course I would have to clean up my chisel and I was a little sour about the damaged handle.

At home I emptied out my entire school bag onto my bed because I had hidden the chisel deep down at the bottom. All my things came tumbling out. Books, pens, lunch box - and then an icy, cold sweat broke out all over my body as two wood-chisels came tumbling out.

One nice and shiny, the other blotted with white paint.

Why are we so quick to judge others? Is it really because they are guilty or because we feel we are better than them? Or maybe it is because they are not doing things the way we feel they should be done? Often we give it a more appropriate name like 'constructive criticism,' but a rose by any other name is still a rose.

Jesus did not judge even though he had the right too. He simply said, 'God forgive them.' Not judging others (even if they are doing something wrong) does not mean we are condoning wrong doing or sin. God loves the sinner but not the

sin. There is a big difference. Stop and think about it for a minute – why are we so willing to excuse those things in ourselves, which we are so quick to accuse in others?

We take a long time to learn

The story of when the Jewish leaders brought the woman caught in adultery to Jesus is so typical of what we are talking about.¹ Yes, they were trying to trick Jesus, but they definitely judged this woman nonetheless. I mean, she was a nobody and they were important leaders in the community. On top of that, look how she dressed and her lack of education. Jesus' words are so telling are they not? "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone."² When Jesus stoops to write in the sand with his finger the Bible does not record what he wrote. However, I like what some commentators say, that maybe he was writing

“For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its Saviour”. Have sweeter words of pure honey ever been spoken...”

of judging others

down some of the sins of the woman's accusers. Is it not also telling that the first to leave were the eldest?

Maybe it takes us a long time before we learn some of these lessons about not being judgemental towards other people.

When Jesus looks up at the woman standing there alone and says to her, "I do not condemn you" I can only imagine how she must have felt. Those must have been the kindest, most loving words she had ever heard in her life. Make no mistake, Jesus does also tell her "to go and sin no more".

The love and nature of Jesus and God are summed up so beautifully in John 3:17, where it is written that God did not send Jesus to earth to condemn us, but to save us. The Good News Bible renders it as follows: "For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its Saviour". Have sweeter words of pure honey ever been spoken, especially when we begin to fully

¹ John 8:3-11

² John 8:7

grasp that we are just as guilty as the next person?

My arrogance and judgemental attitude instantly evaporated that day as I stood looking down at two, red handled wood-chisels laying on my bed. Suddenly, I came up with all the excuses in the world as to why I should not be too harshly judged. Jesus, please don't let them throw stones. Please look down once more from the cross with love and understanding in your eyes and ask God to forgive me too.

It was very hard that day, as a ten-year old, to walk up to Clayton at school and give him back his wood-chisel, while eating humble-pie. Clayton was a bigger man than me and we actually became good friends. Thankfully he did not judge the book by its cover. □

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allowed humans to die as a consequence of the tragic events that took place in the Garden of Eden.

We have to remember that God gave Adam and Eve a choice.³ They chose to disobey God and through their choice death entered into the world. Each human being is therefore appointed to die. So whether you die as a two month old baby or as a 120 year old senior citizen, you will die and in allowing that to happen, God would have done you no wrong.

The book of Job articulates this very well. He says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."⁴

God does not owe us anything. Life is a privilege that he has given us and not a right that we can demand from him.

Abraham understood this very well. He had to choose whether to sacrifice his son or not. He knew God had promised him that Isaac would be the seed through whom God would make Abraham's name great. He trusted that God was the author of life and held both life and death in his hands. He was rewarded for that trust. Atheists love to use the example of Abraham and Isaac to try and illustrate how bloodthirsty God is, but neglect to mention two things. Firstly that God had no intention of allowing Isaac to be killed. God stops Abraham and provides another sacrifice. Secondly that Isaac was a willing participant. The sacrifice was a test of Abraham's loyalty, love and trust in God and Isaac prefigured Jesus Christ.

Death is not the final outcome

In all this talk of death, keep in mind that the death of our physical bodies does not necessarily signify the end

¹ Exodus 20:13

² Judges 6:3-5

³ Genesis 2:17

⁴ Job 1:21

of our existence. When Jesus was confronted with the issue of death he had a very interesting way of looking at it. In Mark 5:39, Matthew 9:24 and John 11:11, Jesus raised people from the dead and in each instance he referred to them as being *asleep* prior to their resurrection. To God the death of the physical body is like the person going to sleep. It is not necessarily the end of their existence.

To recapitulate: It is not immoral for God to kill us, nor allow us to die. God determines the standards for morality. We are suffering the consequences of a world doomed to die because of sin. We are not doomed to die because we are innocent, but because we are guilty.

God does not owe us anything. He does not do us any wrong by killing us or by allowing us to die. Ultimately the death of the physical body does not necessarily constitute the end for us.

That is the good news that Jesus came to give us, which is that God loved the world so much that through Jesus' sacrifice, everyone will have access to eternal life. We recognize the possibility that not all humans will choose Jesus as their Saviour; for some hell will become very real. But I would like to believe that the vast majority of mankind will choose eternal life.

All humans experience death as a traumatic and terrible event. For the Christian who believes, there is great comfort that death is not the end, but simply the next stage in of a wonderful life in Christ. □

True freedom

When I first became a Christian I read the Bible verses quoting Jesus telling his disciples he would “set us free.”¹ That puzzled me. Free from *what*? It seemed to me that Jesus gave a lot of instruction to his followers, including many “do’s” and “don’ts” that didn’t seem like “freedom” to me.

I have since learned there are two kinds of “freedom”, and when we follow Jesus’ instructions on how to live we actually do experience a most rewarding type of freedom.

Let’s compare two types of freedom.

Freedom to do what we want

We all descended from Adam and Eve. After God created them, He gave them some clear, simple instructions, and warned them that disobedience would cause them to die. Satan spoke to them later, telling them they would not die, prompting them to ignore God’s warning, and to follow a path of “freedom” to decide for themselves what was right and what was wrong.

The entire human race, including you and I have inherited the freedom-seeking mind of our first parents. Like them, our natural inclination is to do what seems pleasant to us, and put possible consequences out of mind. This inclination is strongest in our teenage years. As we grow older we become wiser through painful experience or from seeing examples of other people that certain activities bring harsh consequences. Our conduct tends to improve as we age. But, still, there remains in us a lingering temptation to follow our naturally selfish desires. We can, as individuals, if we are not careful, be tempted to sample some of the wrong choices our world has to offer.

On a larger than personal scale, the desire for “freedom” has brought some tragic consequences to much of our world. “Free speech” has led to vulgarity and degenerate music. “Free sex” has brought on homosexuality, disease, disruption of the God-ordained family unit, juvenile delinquency, guilt, unhappiness and depression. Academic “freedom” has resulted in pornography being called “art.” “Free choice” has evolved into moral relativism which denies any “right” or “wrong”, with many people viewing Jesus’ instructions as “out of date.”

Scripture is full of examples of war, slavery, disease, and violence—all the results of people and nations ignoring God’s instruction and doing what seemed right to them at the time. The book of Judges, for example, recounts a particularly bloody time in Israel’s history. The book concludes with the explanation, “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as



by
Paul Hailey

he saw fit.”² That is a lesson for us—when we yield to our natural desires for freedom to follow our natural impulses, we will reap painful consequences individually and nationally.

Freedom to do what comes naturally eventually leads to loss of genuine freedom. “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”³ There is a better kind of freedom.

Freedom that comes from obeying Jesus

When Jesus said he came to set us free, He meant it. His freedom releases us from the consequences of human “freedom.” He offers a way of life that is far more rewarding than the ways our natural inclinations lead us. In following Jesus we find freedom from guilt, bad conscience, fear of death, and worry about the necessities of life. His freedom puts us on a path that will bring us into a joyful relationship with Him that will last forever. We find joy and fulfillment in helping other people. We become free to cast all our cares upon Jesus, knowing that in the end He will bring us out of all of our troubles.

Jesus’ kind of freedom releases us from captivity to

the results of doing what our naturally selfish human nature would lead us. The Apostle Paul explained Christian freedom this way, “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to

righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”⁴ He continued, speaking with gratitude, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”⁵ That’s the kind of freedom Jesus offers us when we follow Him.

I have learned that when we obey Jesus, we not only become free from the ultimate penalty of sin, but we also experience an abundant and satisfying life.

The choice is ours—human “freedom” or Christian freedom. If we are wise we will choose to subdue our natural desire for “freedom” and wholeheartedly embrace Jesus, who truly does set us free. □

“When we obey Jesus, we not only become free from the ultimate penalty of sin,”

¹ John 8:30–36

² Judges 21:25

³ Proverbs 14:12

⁴ Romans 6:16–18

⁵ Romans 8:1–2

Worshipping in spirit and in truth

I leave for work very early in the morning before dawn. That's because the traffic jam that one has to endure a short while later is enough to drive anyone crazy. Driving along the roads with few cars at such an early hour is relaxing and gives me time to observe many things. One very interesting observation is the presence of people who are walking in to various places of worship even at such an early hour. I see Muslims walking to their mosques for dawn prayers, Hindus at their temples and Catholic Christians too at Churches. These are people who start their day by worshipping at their respective places of worship. They are the ones who feel that beginning their day at their place of worship has a significant role in their daily affairs. For them it is a daily routine that is not to be missed. What about most of us who cannot perform such routines daily? It is a fact that the vast majority of people simply cannot be at places of worship at such an early hour everyday as they have children to send to school and have to rush off to work, often at a maddening pace.

Would God be displeased with us if He wasn't the first thing on our minds as we start the day? Does the place we worship matter the most to God?

Some people even insist that worshipping in their particular church is the only acceptable worship before God. In a faith that speaks of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control,¹ why is there such division as to which church one should worship? Is this something that occurs only in modern day churches?

It may come as a surprise that divisions in worship have always existed, even at the time when Jesus was preaching the gospel.

In the gospel of John, there is an important incident recorded that puts things in proper perspective. Jesus came to a city of Samaria called Sychar and being weary after a long journey, sat by a well to rest. A Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well and Jesus being thirsty asked her for a drink. The woman immediately pointed out that Samaritans and Jews had no dealings to which Jesus proceeded to explain who he was and was even able to state that the woman had been married five times and was now living with another man. The woman perceiving that Jesus was someone special then asked him to explain which the true place of worship was. Her people worshiped on a mountain in Samaria while the Jews worshiped in Jerusalem. Jesus explained it was neither the mountain nor Jerusalem that mattered.² He revealed that true worshippers would worship the



by
**Devaraj
Ramoo**

Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.³ Jesus further explained that God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.⁴

Jesus clarifies what is needed for true worship. In Christ's entire ministry he never insisted worship to be in any specific place or to any object. That includes the awe that humans attribute to 'holy objects' or 'persons' as well. What did he mean when He said that worship has to be in spirit and in truth?

The word spirit used here does not mean the Holy Spirit. It refers to our own spirit or our emotions. It refers to our heart. Worship in spirit means offering up ourselves to God by connecting with Him in the essence of our consciousness. We seek God with our entire feelings and emotions. Those feelings and emotions always begin with the desire to praise and glorify God.⁵ We praise God for his Majesty, his creation, his omnipresence, his protection and his real presence in our lives. When we worship, our hearts go

with the worship. That is why we can never fool God with our prayers. Would you believe that some of the most meaningful, heartfelt and emotional prayers have nothing to do with where one chose to worship? The prayer may have been sent to God in your car as you were driving to work. Perhaps while waiting for the bus. Perhaps while in anguish when seeing a loved one suffer. Perhaps even in prison. Our deepest prayers may not necessarily have been uttered in church. We have not worshipped until and unless



our hearts have connected with God.

Next when Jesus mentioned about worship in truth, he was talking about accuracy. Worship alone is insufficient if we lack the accuracy of who we need to address our worship to. Truth is a representation of things as they really are and not what we think or hope they are. Here too Jesus clarified what is truth. He said that God's Word is truth.⁶ But he didn't stop there; he added something that no one would dare say. He revealed that He is the way, the truth and the life.⁷ He made it clear that our heartfelt worship to God the Father is through His Son Jesus.

When Jesus was resurrected and appeared again after his death at the cross, his disciple Thomas did not believe. He did not believe that Jesus personified the Word of God. But when he placed his fingers at Jesus' hands and side to see the marks of the wound that Jesus suffered, Thomas exclaimed "My Lord and my God!" At that moment he worshipped in spirit and in truth. Why shouldn't we be able to do the same? □

¹ Galatians 5:22

² John 4:3-21

³ John 4:23

⁴ John 4:24

⁵ Psalm 51:15

⁶ John 17:17

⁷ John 14:6

The Pinocchio effect

Do you remember the character Pinocchio? The wooden puppet whose nose would grow longer every time he told a lie? Well, that story may not actually be as far-fetched as it may seem.

Researchers from the University of Granada, Spain, Department of Experimental Psychology have discovered that when a person tells a lie, there is an increase in the temperature around their nose and in the orbital muscle in the inner corner of their eyes. They are, of course, calling it the Pinocchio effect. Also, researchers at the University of Notre Dame performed a 10-week study and found that telling fewer lies can literally improve your health.

This new research shows that when people managed to reduce their lies, they reported significantly improved physical and mental health. Notre Dame Psychology professor and lead author, Anita Kelly says, "Participants could purposefully and dramatically reduce their everyday lies, and that in turn was associated with significantly improved health. Those who reduced their lying suffered less from physical complaints such as sore throats and headaches, as well as feeling tense or melancholy."

According to a "Science of Honesty," recent evidence indicates that Americans average about 11 lies per person, per week. Frankly, that seems a bit conservative. With my tongue buried deep in my cheek, I wonder if they included politicians in their research. Regardless, it does seem to be a scientific fact that lying is a health hazard. The old saying that honesty really is the best policy, especially when it comes to your overall health and well-being holds up in this case.

I always find it fascinating when scientific advances are touted as if some new truth has been discovered, only to find it has been revealed in the bible many centuries ago. I like the way the Living Bible renders what the Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:25: "Stop lying to each other; tell the truth, for we are parts of each other and when we lie to each other we are hurting ourselves."

Paul also boldly stated in a letter he wrote to Titus that it is impossible for God to lie. Our triune God is not restricted by time, space, or any physical force. As other scriptures show, with God *anything* is possible. But perhaps we should say *nearly* anything. His very character has determined that He will never do some things, because to do them would be to contradict the nature of his core being. Since he created us, it follows that he really does know what is best for us. That includes telling the truth.

You may remember that Pinocchio's great dream is to be transformed from being a wooden puppet into a real boy. Eventually this happens, and he becomes a real son to the man who made him. Again, an interesting analogy, because God—who, remember, cannot lie—has told us that he will transform us, restoring us to who we were meant to. That is the truth, and I tell you this with confidence. My nose is not getting any longer. □



by
**Dr. Joseph
Tkach**



Grace to be who you are

I enjoy riding a bicycle for exercise and try to ride almost every day. One day this past summer, believe it or not, it rained—in the summer, in California! It wasn't really rain, but there was enough moisture I decided not to ride. I don't have rain gear and didn't want to get wet. Not that I'm afraid I'll melt, I just don't like going out in the elements without the proper clothing. So, not wanting to miss a workout, I pulled out an old exercise DVD.

I started to laugh as Tony Little appeared on the screen, telling me to "Conceive, believe and achieve." I used to work out regularly with Tony and realized I've missed his wit and wisdom. As we started into a nice stretch for the back, Tony reminded me to go only as far as I can go. "Well, of course," I always say. What else does he expect?

Tony may not realize it, but he has hit upon an essential element of grace. As we each work our way through life, we can only go as far as we are able. We may see someone achieving something wonderful and think, "I should be doing that." But if or when we can't, we may become discouraged and may even give up. We compare ourselves to others, then judge and condemn ourselves. Or others may judge and condemn us because they feel we should be more like them.

The grace we receive from God and in turn extend to others and ourselves allows us to go at our own pace, fall down and get up again, without fear of condemnation. God knows our weaknesses and faults. He knows our strengths and abilities. He doesn't expect everyone to look alike, act alike or be in the same place in their growth.

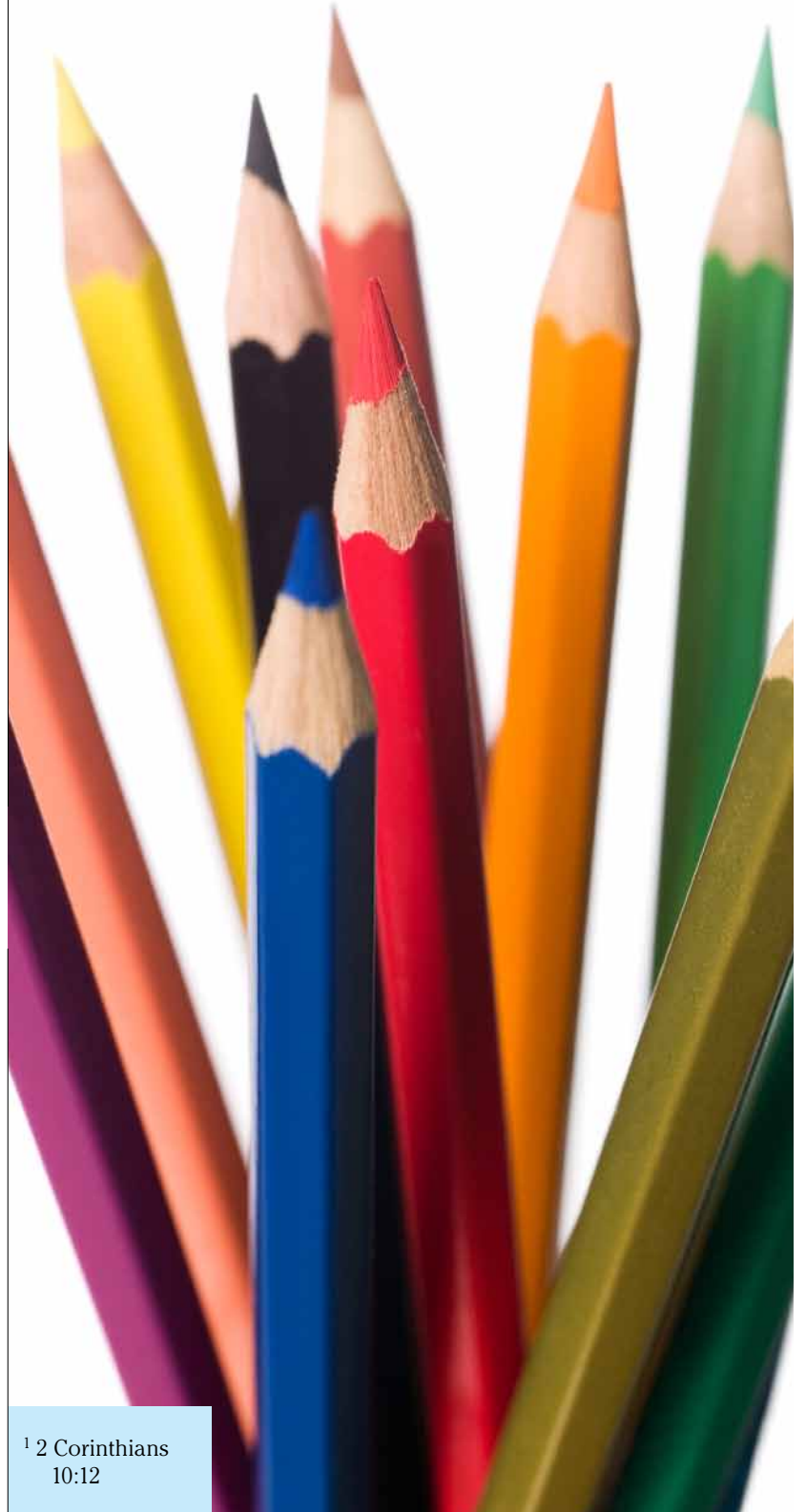
God values our unique personalities, and his grace gives us room to be who we are. We can be happy we have different gifts and talents and give glory to him as we use them to serve him and others. How can we do less for each other? Just as we have received forgiveness and are learning to extend it in return, so we are to honor and respect each other by showing grace in our everyday interactions.

Paul was careful to stay away from making comparisons: "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise".¹

Even nature teaches us each star, tree, flower, animal—everything—has its value, glory and purpose. Each of us has value and purpose, with our own unique place in the world. We have the freedom to do what we do best and not worry about what we can't do.

God's grace is a marvelous gift and touches every part of our lives. Go as far as you can go and may his grace be with you on the way. □

by
Tammy Tkach



¹ 2 Corinthians
10:12

The Holy Spirit at work

Pentecost is a time of celebration among congregations throughout the world. It is a commemoration of the establishing of the church, God's primary method for collective mission and ministry.¹ It is a season when Christians remember that they have been "endued with power from on high"—the Holy Spirit, "the Promise" of the Father.²

"The Lord (that is, Jesus) is the Spirit"³ and "God (the Father) is Spirit."⁴ Biblically speaking, the Holy Spirit is God. It is evident from Scripture that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct, and yet one.

But what does the Holy Spirit do? Many good books, and some questionable ones, have been written about this question.

From the Bible, we know a lot about what the Holy Spirit does in and with Christians. For example, the Spirit dwells in those who belong to Christ.⁵ The Spirit regenerates us.⁶ The Spirit testifies that we are God's children,⁷ guarantees our inheritance,⁸ produces godly fruit in us,⁹ sanctifies us,¹⁰ and unifies us with other believers,¹¹ etc. Scripture describes the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth,¹² of life,¹³ and of grace.¹⁴

After Jesus had washed the feet of his disciples and explained that one of them would betray him, he prepared them for his death by telling them what would happen once he had accomplished his sacrificial work on the cross. This is recorded in John 14 through 17. Jesus told the disciples that the Father would send the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit would do certain things. Let's use John 14:26 as a summary framework for understanding what the Holy Spirit does today.

John 14:26 reads, "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I have said to you."

The Helper, whom the Father will send in my name

The Spirit helps us in our Christian walk. The Greek word used here is usually transliterated *Parakletos*, meaning Advocate or Comforter—someone who beseeches on behalf of another. This term does not appear often in the New Testament. An additional usage is in 1 John 2:1, where Jesus is described as an Advocate for us with the Father. Jesus, who knows our frame and our weaknesses, having shared humanity with us as God in the flesh, comforts us by pleading our cause through his sacrifice and resurrection for us.

Jesus uses the expression *Parakletos* in reference to himself and the Holy Spirit—"I will send you *another* helper."¹⁵ Jesus is our helper in heaven, whereas the Holy Spirit is our helper on earth, now that Christ has ascended to the Father.

The Spirit also pleads the cause of Christ in our hearts and in our minds. He educates and prompts our consciences, helping us resist the temptations of the devil. He reminds us of Christ's will for us so we can be led by Christ, and helps us in our prayer life when

**by
James
Henderson**

words and thoughts fail us,¹⁶ thus making intercession for us.

This is not an independent work of the Spirit.

Whatever the Spirit does is according to the will of the Father. The Spirit continues, in Jesus' name, the work of the Father and the Son in the world and in the church.¹⁷

He will teach you all things

In John 16:13 Jesus says, "The Spirit will guide you into all truth." Again, this is not an independent action of the Spirit. John 16:13 stresses, "He [the Spirit] will not speak of his own *authority*, but whatever he hears he will speak." Just as the words that Jesus spoke were the words of the Father,¹⁸ so it is with the Holy Spirit—the Spirit does not speak his own thoughts, but the thoughts he hears from the Father. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one. The Spirit and the Son do only the will of the Father.

How does the Spirit lead and teach us? Sometimes we forget the most obvious way, or we feel (mistakenly) that it is insufficient. "Moved by the Holy Spirit,"¹⁹ men of God wrote the Old and New Testaments. The Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the epistles of Paul, Peter, James, John and Jude, the books of Hebrews and Revelation—were given to the church through the Spirit's inspiration since the day of Pentecost. They are instructive for us, showing what God's will is for us, teaching us more fully in the way of Christ. "The sword of the Spirit...is the word of God."²⁰

The Spirit also guides the believer to take opportunities to spread the gospel. This can be observed in the book of Acts. When opportunities presented themselves, such as the gathering on the day of Pentecost itself and the crowds at the market place near Mars Hill in Athens, the Holy Spirit inspired Christians to take advantage of those opportunities.

Within the church context, the Holy Spirit provides gifts and strengths to individuals for the furtherance of the gospel and for the edification of the believers. This "demonstration of the Spirit" is part of teaching and guiding.²¹

And bring to your remembrance all things that I have said to you

The Holy Spirit helped the apostles remember the life and teachings of Christ and to write about them for future generations, including us. The Spirit also helps us remember the example and words of Jesus so we can become more like the Son.

The Spirit points us to Jesus. Always. The Spirit does not draw attention to himself, but he glorifies Jesus, and declares him to us.²² Confessing that Jesus Christ, God incarnate, came and died and rose for us is a work of the Spirit of God in us.²³ The Holy Spirit never minimizes Christ by taking center stage for himself. Never. The Gospel is about the atoning work of Jesus Christ, enabled by the Father and proclaimed through

¹ Acts 2

² Luke 24:49

³ 2 Corinthians 3:17

⁴ John 4:24

⁵ Romans 8:9

⁶ John 3:5–6

⁷ Romans 8:16

⁸ Ephesians 1:14;
2 Corinthians 1:22

⁹ Galatians 5:22

¹⁰ 2 Thessalonians 2:13

¹¹ Philippians 2:1; Ephesians 4:3–4

¹² John 14:17

¹³ Romans 8:2

¹⁴ Hebrews 10:29

¹⁵ John 14:16

¹⁶ Romans 8:14,
26–27

¹⁷ Ephesians 1:17

¹⁸ John 17:8

¹⁹ 2 Peter 1:21

²⁰ Ephesians 6:17

²¹ 1 Corinthians 2:4, 12:11

²² John 16:14

²³ 1 John 4:2

²⁴ Luke 3:22

²⁵ John 5:36

²⁶ 1 John 4:13

Many folks want to serve God, but only as advisers.

Anonymous

People don't resist change. They resist being changed.

Peter Senge

When a man is wrapped up in himself, he makes a pretty small package.

John Ruskin

An error does not become truth by reason of multiplied propagation, nor does truth become error because nobody sees it. Truth stands, even if there be no public support. It is self-sustained.

Mahatma Gandhi

For however devoted you are to God, you may be sure that he is immeasurably more devoted to you.

Meister Eckert

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your

heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness.

C.S. Lewis

Is it possible that grace is counterintuitive to the religious mindset? Religion is about us and what we do to gain God's favour and to make spiritual progress. It focuses on doing better to be better. Grace takes a totally opposite approach. Grace assures us that it isn't about you and me and what we do to improve ourselves for God. It never has been and never will be. It's about Him and His ridiculous, irrational,

excessive, loving grace. The self-righteous crowd might as well calm down. Jesus is Jesus and He's not going to change to fit their expectations or ours. Thank God.

Steve McVey

He who knows no hardships will know no hardihood. He who faces no calamity will need no courage.

Mysterious though it is, the characteristics in human nature which we love best grow in a soil with a strong mixture of troubles.

Harry Emerson Fosdick

Real joy comes not from ease or riches or from the praise of men but from doing something worthwhile.

Sir Wilfred Grenfell

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

The Lord gave us two ends—one to sit on and the other to think with. Success depends on which one we use the most.

Ann Landers

Experience enables you to recognize a mistake when you make it again.

Franklin P. Jones

A narrow mind is usually accompanied by a wide mouth.
Seen on a church sign

So our life in Christ is not something that we're always going to feel some kind of glorious heaven-opened-light-shining-down wonderful moment. It's actually lived out in the midst of the struggles of day-to-day life and

the messiness of real relationships and the ups and downs.

J. Michael Fezell

It is easier to fight for one's principles than to live up to them.

Alfred Adler

The ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.

Albert Schweitzer

I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.

Helen Keller

A free will is not the liberty to do whatever one likes, but the power of doing whatever one sees ought to be done, even in the very face of otherwise overwhelming impulse. There lies freedom indeed.

George MacDonald

continued from page 22

the Spirit.

God the Father sent Jesus Christ to us and pointed to him, saying that Jesus is his beloved Son in whom he is well pleased.²⁴ The Son affirmed that he did the works of the Father who sent him²⁵—so the Son pointed us to the Father. The Son also pointed to the promise of the

Father—the Holy Spirit, who in turn always points us to Jesus. These three are one—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

“By this we know that we abide in him, and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.”²⁶ □

The Plain Truth Magazine



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