

THE Plain Truth

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A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Jan - March 2020

Being Real P.7

When A Crisis Strikes P.10

Tapping Into Quantum Reality P.12

Deep Church P.20

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You Are A New Creation!

Wish you a Happy, Joy-filled New Year 2020!

Let's start this year with a new creation mindset. The old (past) is gone, and the new has come! Let's celebrate the new by living a new kind of life patterned after the risen Christ.

Jesus said, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life". The preposition 'the' tells us that Jesus is the only Way, the only Truth and the only Life! Jesus can make that bold claim because he is God! He assumed our sinful nature, and beat (transformed) it to his holy, righteous and blameless nature. He suffered the consequences of our sin, died on the cross, and rose from the grave. Jesus is alive today! And God has given him all authority in heaven and on earth!²

Adam's race died!

Humanity began with Adam (and Eve), but Adam didn't trust God. Adam sinned – disobeyed – and brought death to all.³ Adam represented all humanity.

Sin brought guilt, shame, pain, confusion, fear, alienation, helplessness. Sin produced low quality, mediocre life.

God created us for glory – for peace, joy, peace, security, passion, friendship, adventure and fulfilment, but sin brought us sorrow and misery. God was displeased, so he sent his son Jesus to put things right – to restore us to the life of our design. That's justice for God, not meting out punishment for sin.

Jesus put on human form and came as the last Adam, also representing humanity. Jesus assumed our sinful nature, beat it, and made it holy and blameless through grit, pain, blood, sweat and tears. He completely overcame our sinful nature on our behalf, as us! And he did that throughout his earthly life – from birth to death. That makes us holy, righteous, blameless and acceptable to God!

Jesus repented for us, was baptised for us, received the Holy Spirit for us, received God's commendation "this is my beloved and son in whom I am well pleased" for us.⁴ Not just for us, but as us. Jesus overcame our temptations in the wilderness for us, as us.⁵ He cried our cry of abandonment, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" for us, as us.⁶ He assumed our guilt, shame, fear, brokenness, alienation, rejection and disappointment, for us, as us. He was crucified on the cross for us, as us. In short, Jesus became sin for us, suffered its consequences, died our death, in our place, as us, vicariously.

Jesus' race lives!

Thank God, Jesus didn't stay dead in the grave – he



By
Dr. P. Sellappan

- 1 Isaiah 43:19, Revelation 21:5
- 2 Matthew 28:18
- 3 Romans 5:12, Corinthians 5:14-15
- 4 Matthew 3:13-17
- 5 Matthew 4:1-11
- 6 Matthew 27:46
- 7 Colossians 3:4
- 8 2 Corinthians 1:20
- 9 1 John 4:17
- 10 Romans 5:18-19
- 11 John 3:3

rose from the grave! We were co-raised with him. His resurrection is our resurrection. We co-ascended and co-seated with him at the right hand of God! Jesus is face-to-face with the Father, and so are we. How? Because we are in him! Jesus lives, so we live!

All this seems preposterous – unbelievable – but it's true! Not because of anything you did, but because of who you are in Christ. Jesus is your life.⁷ That gives you right standing with God, makes you holy, blameless and acceptable to God. God sees you as he sees Jesus. That's the whole point of Jesus' incarnation, his vicarious life, on your behalf.

The risen Jesus is our Mediator and High Priest. He takes all your imperfect prayers, cleanses, sanctifies and offers them as sweet-smelling aromas to God! That's how our prayers are always Yes in Christ⁸ That's how we can approach God's throne boldly and ask whatever our heart desires. (Beware! Because Jesus mediates your prayers, your prayers might get transformed so they are acceptable to God!)

We receive all these blessings by grace – out of God's good pleasure – because we are his beloved children. Jesus has already redeemed our dented image, so we are holy and blameless. We reflect God's image, we look like him. As Jesus is, so are we in this world.⁹

Apostle Paul tells us, "just as one [Adam's] trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one [Jesus'] righteous act resulted in justification [restoration] and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many [all] were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus] the many [all] will be made righteous."¹⁰

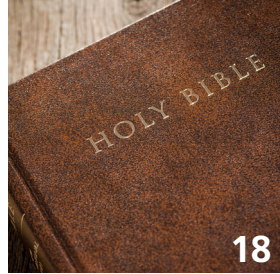
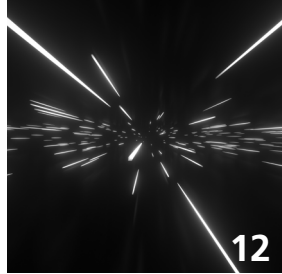
Let's summarize:

You are a new creation in Christ! You are born from above.¹¹ Your old self in Adam died on the cross 2000 years ago – it doesn't exist anymore! There is only one of you – your new you in Christ. God the Father is in Christ, and Christ is in you, and you are in Christ – that's the unbreakable bond Jesus has forged for you! So, let's celebrate our new life in Christ!



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cover story

- 05 Jesus reveals God**
He reflects the true God.

articles

- 07 Being Real**
Admitting our weaknesses strengthen our bonds.
- 08 A deeper look at Jesus' New Command**
Participate in God's dynamic love.
- 10 When a crisis strikes**
Focus on Christ your Savior.
- 12 Tapping into quantum reality**
Focus on things eternal.
- 16 Yes, you can!**
You can serve God even when it seems impossible.
- 17 You have a very good heavenly Father**
You can trust God for all things.
- 18 What does holy mean?**
Jesus has made us holy, so let's live holy lives.
- 19 Love made complete**
Actively love people.
- 20 Deep Church**
Church is community based.

regular features

- 02 Editorial**
- 04 What our readers say**
- 23 Hmm...**

What our readers say:

Your articles seem to focus on Trinity, Incarnation and Christo-centric teaching. What is so special about these teachings?

Reader

Ed: Good (theological) questions. Because of space constraints, we offer here short answers.

Trinity: The Triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - is a relationship God, not a lone, solitary God. The three Persons in the Trinity love each other and give (submit) themselves to each other fully and unreservedly. They are coequals (no superior/subordinate relationship). They are distinct from each other but not separate. They are of one substance (essence) – having one heart, mind, and will. They function or operate as one God, not as three Gods. Everything they do - be it creation, reconciliation, baptism, salvation, etc. - they do together as one God (e.g. Genesis 1:2, 26; Luke 3:21-22; Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14). One may initiate a project/activity, and the other two join and make their own unique contributions to it. They are totally united and can never be separated from each other. (If the Trinity is separated, there would be no God!). The word Trinity is a short form for Tri-unity. Theirs is the epitome of unity in diversity. The Trinitarian relationship of mutual giving and receiving is the template for all relationships in the

universe – be it marriage, business, politics, or atoms (proton, neutron and electron), humans (body, mind, soul), ecosystems, solar systems, and intergalactic systems. Failure to model after him produces chaos (e.g., failing to submit to one another in marriage produces friction; splitting atoms produces explosions).

Incarnation refers to God coming in the flesh in the person of Jesus. Jesus, begotten of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Virgin Mary, was fully God and fully human. Jesus was (and is) God-man. Though God, he voluntarily laid aside his divinity for a season and became man like us in every way except without sin. He represented humanity; he lived like us, was limited like us (the miracles he did, he did only as the Father and Spirit led him to). He was baptised for us, as us; received the Holy Spirit for us, as us; received God's commendation "You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" for us, as us. He overcame sin for us, as us. He assumed our sin and died on the cross on our behalf, as us. He died, rose, ascended for us, as us. We are now seated with him at the right hand of God. We are holy, righteous and perfect in God's eyes because we are in Christ. The risen Jesus is face-to-face with God the Father, and so are we. He is our Mediator and Intercessor in heaven. That's the significance of Jesus' incarnation. You take away Jesus' incarnation, we have no salvation whatsoever!

Christo-centric means we must see and interpret everything through Jesus' lens. For example, the scripture, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" If we don't interpret through Jesus' lens, we will interpret it wrongly to mean that the Father abandoned Jesus when Jesus hung on the cross - implying there was a split in the Trinity! The truth is: the Father never abandoned Jesus while Jesus hung on the cross. The Father (and Spirit) was in Jesus, reconciling the world to himself (Psalms 22:1, 24; 2 Corinthians 5:19). Isaiah 53:10 is a bad translation; it should be rendered something like this: "It pleased the Lord to fully enter or encounter us in the depth of our pain, suffering, confusion and alienation."

Because Trinity, Incarnation and Christo-centric teachings undergird and form the foundation of the Gospel message, we stress these teachings in our articles. Hope this answers your questions!

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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Father
Son of God
Holy Spirit

Jesus Reveals God

The Bible teaches that God is one. There are not two Gods, or three, or a thousand. Christianity is a monotheistic religion. That is why the coming of Jesus Christ aroused such strong controversy in the communities of his day.

A stumbling block to Jews

God revealed himself to humanity through his Son, Jesus Christ, who is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.”¹ Jesus called God his Father² and said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”³ He boldly claimed, “I and the Father are one.”⁴ After Jesus’ resurrection, Thomas addressed him as “My Lord and my God!”⁵ Jesus Christ was God.

Judaism could not accept this. “The Lord our God, the Lord is one,” said the Shema,⁶ which had long undergirded the Jewish faith. Yet here was a man with profound scriptural insight and miracle-working power who claimed to be the unique Son of God. Some Jewish leaders acknowledged that Jesus was a teacher come from God.⁷ But God’s Son? How could God be one, and yet Jesus Christ also be God?

“For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him,” says John 5:18. “Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father.”

The Jews eventually condemned Christ to death because they thought he had, by his claims, blasphemed:

The high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” “I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” They all condemned him as worthy of death.⁸

Foolishness to Gentiles

On the other hand, the Gentiles could not accept Jesus for who he said he was, either. The Greek philosophers thought that nothing could cross the gap from what was eternal and unchanging to what was temporal and material.

So the Greeks scoffed at John’s statement: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... The Word became flesh and

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made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”⁹

For the unbelievers, this unbelievable story didn’t end there. Not only did God become a human being and died, but he was raised from the dead and returned to his former glory.¹⁰ Paul wrote to the Ephesians that God had raised Christ “from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.”¹¹

Elsewhere, Paul addressed the consternation with which the Jews and Greeks greeted the astounding story of Jesus Christ:

Since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.¹²

Not everyone could understand and rejoice at the wonderful news of the gospel. Paul went on: “But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.” And in Romans 1:16 Paul exclaimed, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

I am the gate

During his life on earth, Jesus, God in the flesh, smashed a lot of long-held and cherished – but false – beliefs about what God is, how God lives and what God wants. He illuminated truths that were only hints in Old Testament. He said that no one could be saved except through him: “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.”¹³

“I am the way and the truth and the life,” Jesus announced. “No one comes to the Father except through me.”¹⁴ And: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”¹⁵

- 1 Hebrews 1:3
- 2 Matthew 10:32-33
Luke 23:34
John 10:15
- 3 John 14:9
- 4 John 10:30
- 5 John 20:28
- 6 Deuteronomy 6:4
- 7 John 3:2
- 8 Mark 14:61-64
- 9 John 1:1, 14
- 10 John 17:5
- 11 Ephesians 1:20
- 12 1 Corinthians 1:21-23
- 13 John 10:9
- 14 John 14:6
- 15 John 15:5-6

Jesus is God

Jesus did not do away with the monotheistic command in Deuteronomy 6:4. Rather, Jesus expanded beyond what anyone had imagined what it means for God to be one. The Gospel of John says that, while God is one and only one, the eternal Word existed with God and was God.¹⁶

When the Word came in the flesh, though he was fully divine, he voluntarily set aside the prerogatives of divinity.

[Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!¹⁷

Jesus was fully human and fully divine. He held all the power and authority of God, but he voluntarily, for our sakes, subjected himself to the limitations of human existence. During this period of incarnation, he, the Son, remained one with his Father in heaven.

“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,” said Jesus.¹⁸ “By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me,” he said.¹⁹ And, “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.”²⁰

Just before his crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples: “I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”²¹ Jesus came to earth to die for our sins. He came to found his church. He came to start the preaching of the gospel in all the world. Jesus also came to reveal God to humanity. In particular, he opened human understanding to the Father-Son relationship that exists within the Godhead.

The Gospel of John, for example, largely devotes itself to recording Jesus’ work of revealing God the Father to humanity. Jesus’ Passover discourse²² is of special interest in this regard. What a startling truth about the nature of God! Even more startling is Jesus’ further revelation about how God intends for humans to relate to him.

Humans share in the divine nature!

Jesus told his apostles: “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”²³ God wants to unite humans to him in a profound relationship of love – the love that the Father and Son share. God is revealed to those in whom that love works.

Jesus went on to explain: “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”

God lives in those who come to him through faith in Jesus Christ, committing themselves to live in allegiance to him. Peter preached: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy

By Grace Communion International

Spirit.”²⁴ The Holy Spirit also is God, as we shall see in the next chapter. The Holy Spirit lives in the believers.

Paul knew that God lived in him: “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.”²⁴ Because Christ lives in us and the Holy Spirit lives in us, God lives in us. But there is only one God.

God revealed himself fully in Jesus Christ. “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.”²⁶ What can this revelation mean to us? By partaking of Christ, through faith in him, we can be partakers of God’s own divine nature! Peter summed it up by saying,

Divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.²⁷

Christ – the perfect revelation of God

How did Jesus Christ reveal God?

Jesus revealed God’s character in all he did and taught.

- Jesus died and was raised from death so that humans may be saved and reconciled to God, and that they may receive eternal life. Romans 5:10-11 says: “If, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”
- Jesus revealed God’s plan to form a new spiritual community — the church — transcending racial and national barriers.²⁸
- Jesus revealed God as the Father of all who are reborn in Christ. Jesus revealed the glorious destiny God has promised to his people. The indwelling presence of the Spirit of God gives us a foretaste of that future glory here and now. The Spirit is “a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.”²⁹
- Jesus also witnessed to the existence of the Father and the Son as one God. Our understanding of God’s unity must allow for Father and Son, must allow for more than one Person within the Godhead. New Testament writers frequently applied the Old Testament names for God to Christ. By doing so, they showed not only what Christ is like, but what God is like, for Jesus is the revelation of the Father, and he and the Father are one. We learn about God as we study what Jesus Christ is like.

Yes, Jesus revealed God (the Father). Seeing Jesus is seeing God!

16 John 1:1-2
17 Philippians 2:6-8
18 John 14:9
19 John 5:30
20 John 8:28
21 John 16:28
22 John 13-17
23 John 14:21
24 Acts 2:38
25 Galatians 2:20
26 Colossians 2:9
27 2 Peter 1:3-4
28 Ephesians 2:14-22
29 Ephesians 1:14

Being Real

By
Rick Shallenberger

It had been a rough week and I was not in the best mood. It was one of those weeks full of challenges—personal and work-related—and I felt God wasn't answering my prayers and giving me what I believed I needed. I started complaining to my wife about going to church and putting on my "church face." You know the one I'm referring to—looking happy and giving the impression that everything is good, and my life was just wonderful. Further, I had to preach that day, meaning I felt I had to make God look good when I didn't feel he was being so good to me at the time.

Cheryl first told me I had to go to church because I was the pastor, and then she said, "Rick, just share your struggles with the congregation. They will see that you face the same things they face, and they will love you for it." It was just one more of those times the Holy Spirit spoke, and it sounded just like Cheryl. "Don't focus on your frustration with God," she continued, "focus on your love for the members." It was good advice. By the time I got to the parking lot I was very much looking forward to being with my church family. I didn't have to put on a church face, I sincerely greeted and smiled at the many members I had grown to love.

My topic that day was Jesus telling the disciples about his betrayal and upcoming death. They argued with him—this wasn't the way they saw that things should be. Peter pulled Jesus aside and chastised him. In the middle of my sermon I realized I was Peter. My bad mood came from God not doing things the way I saw they should be done, so I shared that with the audience. I saw nods of affirmation. I was not alone in my frustration and lack of faith. My way made so much sense, but God had a different plan.

It was one of those sermons that resonated far more than I could have ever planned. Sharing my story and being honest about my angst enabled many to personally relate to what I was saying and to better relate

to me. Further, it made it OK to be transparent with each other about our struggles and challenges. I heard a lot of stories that week from the members. A connection was made that I hadn't planned on. I went home in a much better mood and praising God for the breakthroughs.

It is a misnomer for pastors to believe they cannot be honest about their humanity—their joys, their struggles, their passion, their fears. Pastors are not more spiritual than their members; they do not have a special line to God that is not available to members; they are not more important, more special, more inspired, more anything. They are men and women God has called to shepherd others. It's a special calling, but that doesn't make pastors special in the sense of better.

In our churches, we encourage our pastors to be real—to be who God created them to be—and not put on a different persona when they preach or come to worship services. The Bible gives us wonderful examples of the humanity of the leaders God chose to build his church. Moses, Abraham, David, Peter and Paul all had serious flaws that God shared in the pages of his story. Today in congregations we have leaders, pastors, national and regional directors, superintendents and a president, all of whom have flaws. We love the people God has chosen because they are transparent, they don't put on airs, they are relatable because they know their own humanity and they are devoted to Christ and to their churches.

I still have rough weeks; I still get in bad moods from time to time; and I still have the Holy Spirit speaking through my bride and others reminding me to always look to him, to trust him, to rely on him, and to grow in his grace and knowledge of him.

When leaders do this, churches grow in grace and knowledge, we become more relational, we live in communion, and we become the healthiest expressions of church we can be.



A Deeper Look At Jesus' New Command

Most of us can recite John 13:35, “By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.” I’ve spent most of my life wondering why Jesus referred to this as a “new command.” After all, it was very similar to the great commandment discussion Jesus had earlier in Matthew.

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”¹

So why did Jesus, on his last night with his disciples before heading to the cross, say he was giving them a new command, and then say the new command was to love one another? Wasn’t this already a command?

The answer is in the preceding verse in John 13:34 – and this is what we need to unpack for our congregations as we focus on reaching out in mission.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

If Jesus says he is giving us something new, it seems imperative, we pay attention. This isn’t just anyone giving us a new command, this is Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah, Emmanuel – God with us.

So, what is new?

It is in the phrase, “as I have loved you, so must you love one another.” Let’s look at how Jesus loves us and discuss how that relates to people around us.

Jesus came to us

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...” The reason Jesus came was because of love. He didn’t come presenting himself as God to rule over us and make us conform. Rather, he came and presented himself as one of us—fully human—and lived among us. The fact that he took the initiative is the key to understanding how his command to love is “new.”

Jesus didn’t demand that we come to him; he came to us. He entered our world. He ate our food. He lived as we live. He walked the roads we walk. He dressed the way we dress. He spoke our language. He didn’t wait for us to come to a certain level of understanding, or change our behavior, or demand a certain lifestyle—he simply entered our world. As believers, we can’t just wait for people to come to us—we need to go to them. We want

By
Rick Shallenberger

to be intentional about going to others—loving outside the doors of the church. We want to enter the neighborhood God has called us to. We want to walk the streets, eat the food, speak the language, spend time with others.

Jesus didn’t go all over the world; he came to a specific area or region to start his ministry. Jesus had a target community where he did his ministry and mission.

What is our target community? Is this where God has placed us?

Our target community is those we meet and interact regularly. It’s not the whole township, city, county, or state. We need to be specific in determining where Jesus is inviting us to love others as he loves them. We need to ask God to help us see people the way he sees them, and to love them the way he loves them.

Jesus built relationships

Jesus didn’t stay at home and wait for people to come to him. He went to them – into their neighborhoods, into their communities. He went where people were gathering. He went to those who were hurting, and had needs, and he went to those who were ostracized by others.

When he encountered others, he didn’t just say “follow me” and then go about his business hoping they would follow. He spent time with his disciples. He

built relationships with them, and with many others. People followed him because he was relational. He was invited into people’s homes because he showed them love and they reciprocated. He was enjoyable to be around. And note that some relationships were closer than others. Jesus was intentional in his mission.

The way we show love to our target community is to go out and spend time with them, talking with them. We need to get to know them, find out what their interests are, what their needs are. We need to be present at their events, so we can build relationship. We need to be interested in them – getting to know their views, their hopes, their fears - before sharing our hope and our faith. When they see us interested in them, they will show interest in us. Again, we need to ask God to help us see them through his eyes. We need to see them as his beloved – those he loves so much he sent his Son, and now he is sending us.



¹ Matthew 22:36-40

Jesus got involved

Jesus loved people by getting involved in their communities and in their lives. He spent time in public places – going where the people were celebrating, mourning, meeting, learning, shopping, debating.

One way to show love for people is to go where they go: school events, local sporting events, community picnics, celebrations and meetings. Go to funerals of family members of those you've met. Go to restaurants and coffee shops they go. Let people see you and become familiar with your presence. Let them know you care for

them. Let them know they can call you when they go through trauma or need to share.

Jesus gave us this new command—to actively love others as he loves us—because he knew he was going to send us just as the Father sent him. He knew he was going to invite us to participate in his mission of sharing his love and his life with others.

The new command Jesus gave us—to love as he loves—is to reinforce that love verb.

'Yes, Lord...'

'Yes, Lord...'

John 10:27 tells us, "My own sheep will hear my voice and I know each one, and they will follow me."

I remembered searching for the meaning and answers to my life fifteen years ago. I pulled out twenty various titles from a collection of Christian books at home, flipped through all of them but I couldn't find anything to connect with.

I was getting desperate and began to pray and seek God, asking Him to show and teach me; for He knows exactly what I most need.

One book at a time, He showed and guided me to read, study and grow to get to know and appreciate Him more. Slowly, I found a glimpse of the answer I was looking for. I was set for an exciting journey ahead; hungering for more of His revelation.

The turning point to my understanding for the active presence of God in my life was actually found in the novel, 'The Shack' by Paul Young.

It totally changed my perspective and perception of God. All shackles were removed from my mind. I laughed and cried as I read it. For me, God became real. A very personal God. A very caring God who loves us very dearly.

At a prayer session recently, the facilitator drew a pair of ears with both sides joining together to form the shape of a heart. God wants us to have a listening heart for Him. Just looking at the word "heart" - it consists of the words, 'hear' and 'ear', ending with the letter 't'. I relate to the letter "t" as 'pointing to and symbolizing the "tree/cross", who is Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.' Hmmm, a simple word summarizes it all – cultivate a hearing heart for Jesus...

Scriptures also remind us:

"O my people, listen to my instructions. Open your ears

By
Anna Teo

to what I am saying."¹

"Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it."²

Whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.

At another prayer meeting some years ago, the facilitator and I prayed over an event and it was answered.

I was so excited and I praised and thanked God for it. Then I received a prompting, 'share it'... I was in the midst of finishing up some household chores, so I thought, "OK, maybe I will do it after I'm done." Another prompting came, this time it was louder: 'share it'. I dropped everything and said 'yes, Lord!' I immediately sent a text out to my friend and we were both so happy, thankful, encouraged; and we praised God together.

I resumed my cleaning and went to the storeroom to retrieve a newspaper to line the dustbin. After pulling out the first sheet, the next one drew my immediate attention. It had two words in bold capital letters on it, 'THANK YOU.'


Wow! I was so taken aback with amazement, awe and wonder. A coincidence perhaps, some may say? However, when we truly believe that God is living in us and is working in our lives, it is a 'God-encounter' always. I was also beaming with full admiration for our God who is so polite. I realized later that I had completely forgotten to say, 'You are welcome, my Lord!'

Andrew Murray tells us: "God's presence is meant to be the continual experience of Christians."

Since then, I always ask Him: 'I want what You want for me, Lord!' When You said, "Seek My face," My heart said to You, "Your face, Lord, I will seek."³

So, what about you?

- ¹ Psalm 78:1
- ² Isaiah 30:21
- ³ Psalm 27:8



When A Crisis Strikes

Are you undergoing a crisis? Perhaps you have undergone a crisis recently or maybe 'dark stormy clouds' are approaching, signalling a crisis on the way. Either way, the results of a crisis can be nothing less than agony, either physically or mentally. Ask anyone and they will relate a crisis that they had experienced, one that made its mark in their lives. A crisis can vary from individual to individual. Some face devastating violence in war torn areas of the world. Some are persecuted, beaten, jailed for their faith. In tolerant nations we may face severe financial crisis, family relationship in tatters, divorce and even abuse. Other crisis includes terminal illness, physical disabilities, old age problems and a huge range of paralysing problems. In all these varying types of crisis three things are apparent.

Firstly, no one is left out. Every human being faces some crisis at some time in their lives. Sometimes it's a string of continual problems. Even God-fearing people suffer. Being a faithful servant of God is not a vaccine against a crisis that may arise unexpectedly. Secondly, when a crisis strikes, it will change our outlook in life. We soon realise how powerless and fragile we actually are. Pride, power and status soon are relegated to the position of worthlessness as we become embroiled in events beyond our control. Thirdly, how we face the crisis is a personal choice. We can choose to stand our ground and face the crisis or we can crumble under the intense weight of the problem. It's times like these that test our faith, often bringing us to realise and see the presence



By
Devaraj Ramoo

of God working in our lives or it can also cause anger and frustration to well up and create animosity or loss of faith in God. Both reactions are realities that have occurred in individuals.

The Bible teaches that we need not face any crisis alone. It tells us to cast our cares on the Lord and He will sustain us.¹ Is that true? For God to sustain us, he must above all be present in our lives. How often have we cried out, "Where are you Lord when I need you?" and faced a response of deafening silence? How about the men and women whose lives are recorded in the Bible? How did they face a crisis? Well, many a times they reacted just as we do. They too pleaded "How long will this go on?"² Sometimes they cried their hearts out.³ The psalmists even record pleadings with a touch of anger towards God for not answering their prayers immediately. It's the same today. We do get angry at God when no answer is in sight. However, down through the ages, God has given only one answer to everyone's pleading. He reminds us that He is with us no matter how dark the situation is. He promises to strengthen and uphold us in every situation. His right hand will always lift us up.⁴ Time and time again He tells us not to be afraid for He will help us. However, His help arrives usually in ways that we do not expect. It is we who fail to see Him working in our lives.

- ¹ Psalm 55:22
- ² Psalm 89:46
- ³ Psalm 42:3
- ⁴ Isaiah 41:10

In the book of Exodus we read of a situation when the ancient Israelites were caught in a situation where there was no escape. God had earlier delivered them through Moses out of the hand of Pharaoh and the Egyptians who had enslaved them for centuries. He had brought them out through mighty miracles and even went with them as they travelled out of Egypt. He was with them is a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to guide them continually. Now they were caught in a situation where the Pharaoh's armies had arrived to slaughter them and there was no place to escape as the Red Sea lay before them.⁵ What was their reaction? They began to curse Moses and show contempt for God even after witnessing the miracles God had done to bring them out of Egypt. Remember they even saw the pillar of cloud and fire that went before them. Even after seeing God first hand in the miracles that He did, they could not trust Him to deliver them. You see in their eyes the problem had become bigger than the God who delivered them.

How many times have we done the same? God had done many miracles in our lives in the past. If we did a little exercise listing all the miracles and times He intervened in our lives, we would see Him crystal clear. Yet when we get into a new crisis we demand that he prove His existence to us. How does God respond? Does He angrily turn away? After all, He may demonstrate His displeasure with us by being exasperated with us for the numerous times we have seen His glory in our lives and yet cannot believe. He could well choose to ignore us. However, that is not the way He reacts to our whining. In the Exodus account we read of how the Israelites looked up, saw the armies of Pharaoh and panicked. They failed to see the more powerful God who was there with them in the pillar of cloud and fire. Their focus drifted to the problem at hand, which to them became greater than the God who was with them. We too have the same mind-set.

Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."⁶ Why is it that we forget the God who has made His home with us when we are in a crisis? The answer is that our tendency is to react in fear not faith. It is our fallen human nature to be fearful. We become worried and fearful in a crisis. Our faith doesn't kick in immediately. We walk by sight and less by faith. Jesus on the other hand walked by faith and not by sight. He was persecuted, threatened with violence, yet He knew nothing could come between Him and His Father in heaven. Even in His most distressful time at the garden in Gethsemane He remained focused on the Father, to do His will. In our Christian walk, faith must take first place over fear. We need to train ourselves through the Holy Spirit to live this way. It takes time.

The Israelites were not at that precarious spot by accident. God had led them there in order to deliver them permanently from Pharaoh. We too sometimes need to remember that God may have brought us to the place of crisis to demonstrate His glory and grace to us. It may be in His will to refine us. The next question we need to ask ourselves is, "How will we be able to see God in this crisis? Moses in the Exodus account had to deal with the people's fear first. Therefore he commanded them to not be afraid, to stand still and to see the salvation of the Lord.⁷ Herein lies the answer to how we relate to God in times of crisis. We begin by casting out the fear. God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power and of love and a sound mind.⁸ Notice a sound mind does not let fear

dictate our life, rather God. God gives us a sound mind so that we do not lose our head in a crisis. That sound mind lets us see God in the crisis. We have a choice of allowing fear to dominate our lives or to trust God and walk in faith.

Next, God want us to stand still. One of the ways to see God in a crisis is to let him know about it and to be still. Don't gripe and grumble and rant and rave over it. Do your part to solve the problem as best as you can, then just be still and let God work it out in His way and in His time. As we stand still, God renews our strength. That is the strength that will carry us through the most challenging moments of the crisis. Then finally, after we discard the fear that paralyzes us and choose to be still in the crisis, we will see the salvation of the Lord. That is the time we see the Lord's hand working to deliver us. God parted the Red Sea after Moses reassured the Israelites, taking away their fear and when they became still they saw the salvation of God. In the same manner God will reveal His salvation in ways that we do not expect.

We need to remember that God has all angles covered. Even in crisis leading to death, He says that He will raise us up again.⁹ Jesus is the resurrection and the life. In that day we will truly see the Lord as He is. His promise never fails. Therefore, let us remember the one we serve. In any crisis He has our back.



⁵ Exodus 14:10-12

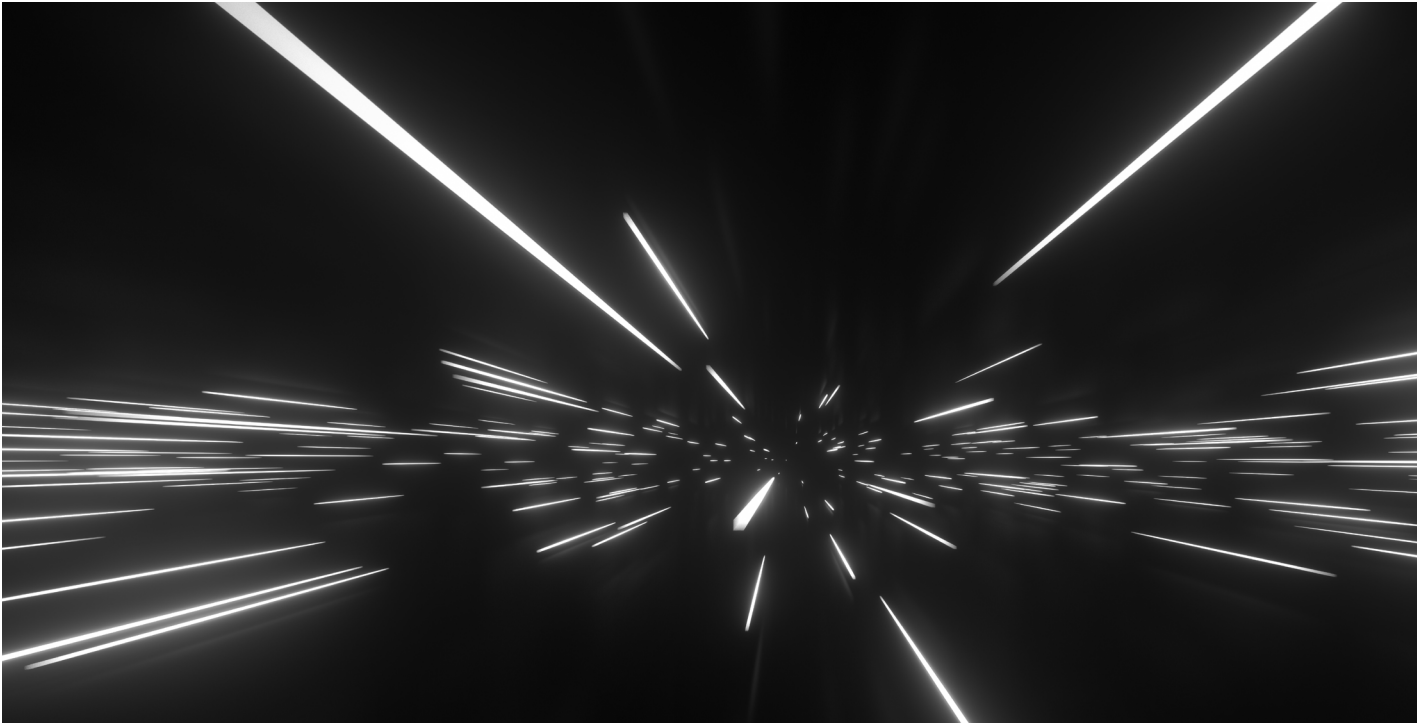
⁶ John 14:23

⁷ Exodus 14:13

⁸ 2 Timothy 1:7

⁹ John 6:40

Tapping Into Q



The Star Trek science-fiction TV series explores the world of big things – galaxies, planets, stars, and gravitational pulls. By contrast, this article explores the world of small things - atoms, quarks, leptons and gluons, and how they might possibly relate to certain scriptures.

God created all things - big and small, visible and invisible.¹ Big things like the sun, moon, stars, mountains, seas, trees, animals, you and me, constitute the visible world. Gravitational forces hold these big things together. Small things like molecules, atoms, electrons, protons and neutrons, constitute the invisible world. Forces like gluons hold these small particles together.

We are mostly conscious of the visible world. For us, seeing is believing, but that is a very narrow view of reality! God wants us to see beyond the visible, into the invisible, from sight to faith! Why because invisible things are eternal and permanent. There is also enormous power packed in these small things.

Newtonian physics (also called Classical physics) and Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity, describes the world of big things. It has more than 100-year history, and its laws (principles) are well established by renowned physicists like Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein.

Quantum physics (also called Quantum mechanics) describes the world of small things. It has a slightly shorter history, and its laws (principles) are also well established by renowned physicists like Neil Bohr, Max Planck, Erwin Schrödinger and Werner Heisenberg.

At first, it was thought that the laws governing big things also applied to small things, but that was proven



By
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wrong. For example, the theory that nothing could travel faster than light (at 186,000 miles per second) was proven wrong in Quantum physics. Einstein was baffled but had to accept the finding as it was proven true in multiple experiments conducted by multiple physicists.

In the rest of the article, we will discuss several quantum physics principles and how they might possibly relate to certain 'miracle' scriptures and challenge our view of reality.

Quantum realities

God created the universe ex nihilo, meaning, from nothing.² He spoke the universe into existence. He made the visible from the invisible.

Quantum physics principles are true and valid, but they are counter-intuitive, even weird! They appear to support the below assertions:

- Things are not always as they appear to be.
- Thought (consciousness, observation, intention, desire, belief, faith) creates matter.
- Observation (measurement, intention, focus) creates matter, makes invisible visible.
- You are a participant, not a spectator - the world operates in participatory mode, not in spectator mode.
- God observed and the earth became habitable.
- God's sees his creation, so we and the universe exist.

¹ Colossians 1:16

² Hebrews 11:3

Quantum Reality

Quantum principles

The principles of quantum physics are true and valid, but how they relate to scriptures is not all that clear. So, please treat this article as possibilities, not as absolute truths!

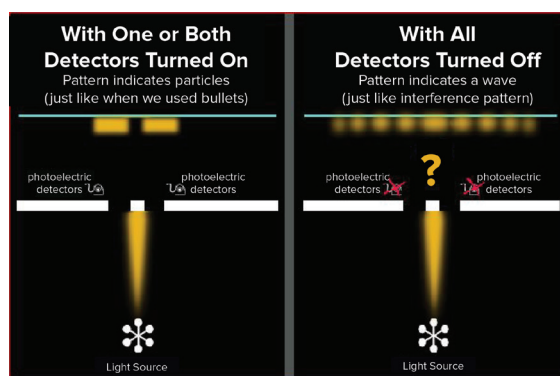
• Wave-particle Duality

Everything in the universe is composed of matter, which can take particle (visible) form or wave (invisible) form. A particle in wave form is said to be in superposition, meaning, it has the potential of being in all possible states simultaneously (i.e. a wave of probabilities).

The famous double-slit experiment confirms this truth. When a beam of tiny particles (e.g. electrons or photons) is fired through two slits (see figure: left image, bottom to top), the particles pass through the slits hitting the back screen and forming two strips directly behind the slits (as we would expect). We will always get this striped pattern whenever someone (or some device) observes the particles (note: the detectors are turned on).

However, if we repeat the experiment but without anyone (or any device) observing the particles (note: the detectors are turned off), we will always get a wave pattern represented by many tiny strips spread across the whole screen, not just behind the slits (see figure: right image, bottom to top). This wave is caused by what is called an interference pattern.

Left image: particles behave as particles; Right image: particles behave as wave



This leads to the next principle – the Observer effect.

• Observer Effect

The difference between the two experiments is this: when the particles are observed, they behave like particles; when they are not observed, they behave like waves! The very act of observation seems to change the particles' behaviour! Stated differently, observation collapses the particles' superposition (all possible states or positions the particles can be in) to a single reality (state). Observation collapses the particles' wave form to particle form.

Scripture references:

Scripture tells that God has given us all things in Christ:

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."³

"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence..."⁴

"Everything is possible for one who believes."⁵

"...whatever you ask in my name...I will do it."⁶

"All of God's promises are Yes in Christ."⁷

God's blessings are available to us 24/7 in the superposition. Our believing prayer collapses the superposition (wave of blessings), and we manifest them as 'particles' of blessing – be it healing, peace, contentment, joy, hope, encouragement, job, financial breakthrough.

How did Jesus (as man) heal and cast out demons?

Jesus confessed, "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me⁸... "I do nothing on my own initiative. I only do what I see [observe] the Father do and say what I hear Him say. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.⁹ The Father had given Jesus all things...¹⁰ Jesus prayed and collapsed these blessings, manifesting in healing and casting demons.

God has given us every blessing in Christ. When we see (with our spiritual eyes) what Jesus is doing, and hear what the Spirit is saying, we too can collapse these blessings, so they manifest in our lives.

More examples:

- First the earth was formless [in wave form, in superposition]. God saw [observed], then light appeared.¹¹ Seeing collapsed the superposition to a single reality - light.

- The LORD sees everything...¹² Because he sees, we (and the universe) exist. If God doesn't see, we will not exist!

- A large Syrian army had surrounded Israel. Terrified, Elisha's servant reported to his master. Elisha assured him, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Elisha prayed, "LORD, open his eyes that he may see." The servant now saw horses and chariots of fire.¹³ Observing made Israel's army real to the servant.

- The woman with blood disorder believed Jesus could heal her. She looked at Jesus intently, touched his garment, and was healed. Seeing changed her physical condition.¹⁴

- Jesus perceived his Father's desire, prayed and multiplied the bread and fish, and fed the multitudes.¹⁵

³ Ephesians 1:3

⁴ 2 Peter 1:3

⁵ Mark 9:23

⁶ John 14:13

⁷ 2 Corinthians 1:20

⁸ John 5:30

⁹ John 5:19-20

¹⁰ John 13:3

¹¹ Genesis 1:2-4

¹² 2 Chronicles 16:9,

Proverbs 15:3

¹³ 2 Kings 6:16-17

¹⁴ Luke 3:43-48

¹⁵ Mathew 13:14-21,

John 6:1-14

• Delayed Choice

The above experiment produces the same result whether the particles are observed before or after passing through the slits. If the detectors are switched on after the particles had passed through the slits as waves, the waves go back in time and change their state to particle form! This suggests the particles future state effects their past state! Somehow, the particles seem to know ahead of time that they would be observed (watched)! This is called delayed choice. (This is like going back in time and changing our past choices!)

Scripture references:

When Philip asked his brother Nathaniel to meet Jesus, Jesus told Nathaniel, "I saw you under the fig tree." Did Jesus go back in time and see Nathaniel sitting under the fig tree?¹⁶

After his resurrection, it appears Jesus went back in time to proclaim salvation to earlier generations that were in their prison of judgment because they rejected Noah's warning?¹⁷

Jesus died 2000 years ago, yet John tells us that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world.¹⁸ Jesus operates in the I AM mode (reality); so past, present and future has no effect on his actions. God has forgiven our past, present and future sins. How is that possible? Well, Jesus died and secured our salvation before anyone ever sinned!

• Quantum Entanglement

Two entangled particles (e.g. two split photons of light) are correlated no matter how far they are separated or located from each other. In other words, they still act as a single particle! In this entangled relationship, if we know the state of one particle, we automatically know the state of the other.

Scripture references:

Jesus said, "...I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you."¹⁹ This suggests Jesus' entangled relationship with the Father as well as our entangled relationship with Jesus. The Father indwells Jesus, and Jesus indwells us (through the Spirit).

We are co-seated with Christ in heavenly realms because we are in entangled relationship with Christ.²⁰ This seems to imply that our physical and spiritual reality can co-exist in two states simultaneously?

Prophet Ezekiel saw a valley full of dry bones. God assured him that he would raise these bones, put flesh and breathe life into them so they would live again! Each person's entangled body parts, though scattered, would still act as a single body.²¹ The same can be said about the body parts in Revelation 20:13 when the sea and hades give up their dead. The entangled parts, though scattered, would act as single body.

• Quantum Tunnelling

When a particle (e.g. electron) is fired through a solid barrier (e.g. wall), it dematerializes, passes through the barrier, and re-materializes on the other side! It changes from particle form to wave form, passes through the barrier, then reverts to particle form!

Weirder still, if two electrons are fired – one passing through a solid barrier and the other without a solid barrier – and observe which electron reaches its destination first, amazingly the electron that passed through the barrier reaches before the electron that didn't pass through the barrier!

Scripture references:

Jesus rose with a glorified body – one that is not subject to spacetime (space-time) limitation. With that body, Jesus could tap into quantum reality!

The glorified Jesus passed through sealed tomb - dematerialized, tunnelled through the tomb wall, re-materialized - and manifested to Mary. He also appeared to his disciples through locked doors. He was operating in quantum world. We might see these as miracles, but for God they are quantum stuff!

• Quantum Teleportation

A particle can teleport itself instantaneously from location A to location B, no matter how far they are separated from each other. The particle is not physically transported, rather, its properties are extracted and teleported instantaneously to location B and the particle re-created. Its original identity at location A is completely preserved at location B! The particle behaves as wave without any spacetime constraint!

Scripture references:

God teleported Enoch and Elijah to unknown destinations – they vanished from the disciples' view.²²

Jesus teleported himself and appeared to his disciples as they were sailing in a storm. At close range, he started walking on water.²³

Jesus also teleported himself and joined his two disciples on their way to Emmaus. Jesus explained the prophecies concerning his death and resurrection to them. At the end of a long conversation, he broke bread with them and immediately disappeared from their sight!

Erwin Schrodinger's Cat Experiment

In this thought experiment (strictly, not a principle), a cat was put inside a box with some radioactive substance and the lid was closed. Was the cat alive or dead shortly after? While inside the box, the cat was in both states – dead and alive. However, opening the box would reveal if the cat was dead or alive.

Scriptures references:

Jairus' daughter was dead and there was much weeping. Jesus told them, "The child is not dead but asleep."²⁴ They saw a dead girl; Jesus saw a life girl. Similarly, many saw a dead Lazarus, but Jesus saw a live Lazarus.²⁵

We all have lost our loved ones: we see them no more - they are dead and gone. How does God see them? God sees them alive in Christ.²⁶ So it depends on who sees the dead! Surely, what God sees is more real than what we see!

Your glorified life

Jesus rose with a glorified body and manifested to his disciples for 40 days. He tunnelled through walls, teleported to his disciples, went back in time to preach

¹⁶ John 1:43-50
¹⁷ 1 Peter 3:19-20
¹⁸ Revelation 13:8
¹⁹ John 14:20
²⁰ Ephesians 2:6
²¹ Ezekiel 37:1-14
²² Genesis 5:24,
2 Kings 2:11
²³ Matthew 14:22-23
²⁴ Mark 5:39
²⁵ John 11:11
²⁶ Isaiah 26:19,
Daniel 12:2,
1 Corinthians 15:50-54,
1 Thessalonians 4:15-16

salvation to earlier generations. Jesus then ascended into the clouds and disappeared from his disciples' view.

Some of Jesus' disciples had a foretaste of this quantum life. For example:

- The Ethiopian eunuch was reading Isaiah's prophecy. The Holy Spirit told Philip to go and explain the prophecy to him. When the eunuch believed Jesus, Philip baptised him, and vanished (was teleported)!
- As the crippled man begged for money at the temple, Peter and John looked at him intently and asked him to look at them. As the man looked at them eagerly [intently], Peter told him to rise and walk in Jesus' name!" ²⁷ Did their intense gaze change the cripple's lame state to healed state?
- Stephen looked into heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He told his angry mob, "Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."²⁸ There were plenty of things going on in heaven [superposition], but Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. That's what he wanted to convey to his audience - the Christ they crucified had risen and was now at the right hand of God.

God has given us all things in Christ. All that belongs to Jesus also belongs to us. Jesus shares his glory,²⁹ his riches,³⁰ and all things³¹ with us. As heirs and co-heirs with Christ,³² we share in Jesus' inheritance.³³ All this inheritance and sharing will make sense only if we have glorified bodies capable of operating in the quantum world.

Jesus' resurrection is our resurrection. His glorified life is our glorified life. As Jesus is, so are we in this world.³⁴

While Scripture doesn't talk about life in the quantum world, it does give us a glimpse of how our resurrection life might look like.

John tells us: "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."³⁵

God's glory revealed in matter

The invisible is mystically hidden in the visible; Spirit is hidden in matter. The [invisible] Christ is hidden in us. Paul declares, "Christ in you is the hope of glory."³⁶

God displays his invisible attributes³⁷ like beauty, creativity, intelligence, perfection and goodness through visible matter - through his creation. Spirit needs matter to display God's glory.

Whether we realize it or not, the quantum world is all around us! During his earthly ministry Jesus operated both in the visible and quantum [invisible] world. After his resurrection, Jesus was operating mostly in the quantum world. Like Jesus, we too will have opportunity to operate both in the quantum world - in a limited way now, but in a grander way in the future!

Seek the invisible

God asks us to set our affections on things above, seek the invisible:

- "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."³⁸
- Fix your eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.³⁹
- The eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he [God] has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.⁴⁰
- Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.⁴¹

The whole universe is waiting for you! Paul tells us, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."⁴²

Let's summarize:

You have an awesome future – eternal life with God and with multitudes of fellow brothers and sisters in God's kingdom (quantum world?). Like Jesus, you too will be raised with a glorified body – one that is not subject to spacetime limitation. You will not age, fall sick, or die! You will operate both in the visible world and in the invisible (quantum) world. You will have opportunity to release your God-given talents/gifts, not only to restore this earth (and beyond), but also to bring glory to God. At last, you will truly experience the abundant life that God created you for. That life starts now! Is your life, with all its fleeting pains and aches, worth it? God thinks so!

²⁷ Acts 3:4-6

²⁸ Acts 7:55-56

²⁹ John 17:22

³⁰ 2 Corinthians 8:9

³¹ Hebrews 1:2

³² Romans 8:7

³³ Ephesians 1:11,

1 Peter 1:4

³⁴ 1 John 4:17

³⁵ 1 John 3:1-2

³⁶ Colossians 1:26

³⁷ Romans 1:20-22

³⁸ Matthew 6:33

³⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:18

⁴⁰ Ephesians 1:18-19

⁴¹ Colossians 3:1-4

⁴² Romans 8:18-21



Yes, You Can!

Recently our country had a new king, who was elected by his brother rulers for a five year term, in a unique succession system found only in Malaysia. Suppose you are asked to select a new king. How would you feel to carry out such a heavy responsibility? Well, someone in history did do that.

In 1 Samuel 16 verses 1 to 12 is the story of Samuel anointing David as king of Israel as prompted by God. God later revealed that David was chosen because David was a man after God's own heart.¹ Nevertheless there were three drawbacks that worked against David being made a future king. Because of these disadvantages, David would never have been the ruler if not for God's intervention. The world judges things differently from God. God looked into David's heart and saw him as a suitable king of his country in spite of the physical limitations.²

Similarly, God sees beyond our weaknesses and sees our potential, if only we allow him to. Yes, we can as long as we let him rule our lives.

David's age

The first factor that worked against David was his age. David was the youngest son of Jesse. Most likely, he was still a teenager when he was anointed king. Both King Saul and the giant Goliath considered him still a boy.³ Most people would think that David was too young to be a king. However what David lacked in experience, he more than made up with his right attitude. His youthfulness did not stop God from using him in a most dramatic way.

Jeremiah was a youth when God called him.⁴ Daniel and his three friends were 'young men' when they were used by God.⁵ Apostle John, the youngest of the 12 original disciples of Jesus, was likely in his teens when he first followed Christ. Timothy was already a church leader when he was 'young' or still a 'youth'.⁶ The bible has many more examples of young people serving God mightily. You are never too young to serve.

In the same way, God also uses elderly and more senior people for his purposes. Moses was eighty years old when God first appeared to him.⁷ Joshua was most likely 80 when he took over from Moses.⁸ Abraham was already 75 when God first called him.⁹ Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation on the island of Patmos late in the first century. This means that he was a very old man when God inspired him to write the last book of the bible. Noah was a few hundred years old when God asked him to build the ark.¹⁰

Again, just like earlier, there are many more cases of men while in their advanced ages, still being used powerfully by God. We are never too old to serve. After all, as they say, age is just a number.

By
Wong Teck Kong

David's occupation

David's job as a shepherd was definitely not one that would enhance his chances of becoming king. The task of looking after sheep was usually given to the youngest in the family because it required no education or training. David was not a soldier, a distinct liability for a potential king as kings have to lead their armies to battle.

However, David's non military career is more than made up by his experience as a shepherd. He used the long hours tending sheep to mediate and pray to God and to reflect on life, as stated in the book of Psalms. He learnt about self sacrifice in protecting the flock. He had killed a lion and bear before and he was a lot braver than any Israelite soldier in daring to fight Goliath.¹¹ He had learnt about being faithful to and trusting in God and about loyalty. These lessons do not come from one's occupation but through personal experience.

God had also used people who had unsavoury careers earlier such as prostitutes and tax collectors as well as the humble fishermen.

Similarly today, whatever our jobs are, we can be of use to God. Whether we are retiring or just starting our career, whether we are the simple janitor or the dirty garbage man, our job title does not define who we are. Our daily experiences as a follower of Christ are what made us what we are today. God wants us to use what we have learnt and know to help others. Whatever the tasks we do everyday does not describe the talents God has given to each of us. The world may not appreciate our work (like being a housewife) and may even judge us based on what we do, but like in the case of David, God sees beyond our occupational status and looks at the spiritual potential.

David's physical limitations

Unlike Saul who was very tall and so more impressive¹², there was nothing outstanding physically about David. A big and strong king would surely be a plus point when the king heads Israel into war with the enemies. However there are no indications that David was like that. In fact, the point that David felt uncomfortable wearing Saul's armour may indicate that he could not fit into the size of Saul's armour. Yet David is considered the greatest king Israel ever had. David's physique was no limitation because it was God that was doing the work.

- 1 Acts 13:22
- 2 1 Samuel 16:7
- 3 1 Samuel 17:33, 42
- 4 Jeremiah 1:6
- 5 Matthew 4:1-11
- 6 1 Timothy 4:12
- 7 Acts 7:23, 30
- 8 Joshua 24:29
- 9 Genesis 12:4
- 10 Genesis 7:6
- 11 1 Samuel 17:36
- 12 1 Samuel 9:2

Moses was not an eloquent speaker.¹³ Ehud was a left hander.¹⁴ Imagine if you are a leftie in an army of all right hander. You would break up the formation. Yet God used Ehud's physical liability to kill the enemy king. Deborah was a woman.¹⁵ She would have a hard time leading the men in a society where women had a lower status compared to men. Paul had a 'thorn' in his flesh.¹⁶ Timothy suffered from frequent stomach ailments.¹⁷ The list can go on. However one thing is common. They were all used powerfully by God.

¹³ Exodus 4:10

¹⁴ Judges 3:15

¹⁵ Judges 4:4

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 12:7

¹⁷ 1 Timothy 5:23

¹⁸ Matthew 19:26

What is our excuse?

Whatever our present age (whether 10 years old or 100 years young), whatever our occupation (whether we are employed, unemployed or retired) and whatever our physical condition (whether good, bad or ugly) we can still be of use by God.

Yes, certain ministries need special skills which we may not have and our health can affect how much we can serve. But true service lies in our hearts and our desires to serve and please God.

Do not worry too much about our weaknesses. All the men and women of faith in Hebrews 11 had weaknesses. But it is God who is doing the work and God has no weakness. To God all things are possible!¹⁸

You Have A Very Good Heavenly Father



By
Helen Teo Walton

for him and supports him to become the best he can be. A child with a good father feels loved, secure, and protected; he feels whole.

God's desire is for you to know that He is a good heavenly Father who loves you dearly, and that He is never too busy for you. You can totally depend on Him to protect you, fight for you, provide for you, and do everything a good father does. He wants us to know that as His children, we have a special privileged bond with Him. The first thing the Holy Spirit does when we come to Jesus is witness to our spirits that we are indeed God's children.

He wants us to know how special we are to Him, how well loved we are, and how He's looking out for us as a good father would. As we quieten the noises around us and focus on Jesus, the Holy Spirit's promptings become clearer to us. Listen to the Holy Spirit. In the midst of the issues and troubles of the day, He whispers to you that you are a child of the Most High God. He assures you that your identity is God's beloved child. He wants you to know that all His resources are available to you to live victoriously and gloriously. You lack nothing. You have no fear. You are never alone and never without help.

Lift your eyes off the challenges and trials. See yourself well loved, well supplied and well protected by your heavenly Father. All is fine with you because the Creator of this universe is your beloved heavenly Father who loves you and delights to give you His best.

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:16).

A father-son relationship speaks of a special bond, especially between a good father and his son. A good father loves, protects, affirms and encourages his child. He builds a good relationship with his child, looks out

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What Does “Holy” Mean?

Are Christians Holy?

Holy is a familiar word in the Bible. We normally associate the term with spiritual perfection. But Scripture speaks of several people and even things being holy, including God, the nation of Israel, angels, prophets and priests, and even “holy kiss.” We speak of the Holy Bible, and “holy matrimony.” Scripture tells us to be holy. “Be holy, because I am holy.”¹

How can so many things be “holy?”

“Holy” defined

This question becomes clear when we understand that the original word translated “holy” meant “separate” or “set apart.” The word also carries the connotation of moral purity when applied to people, with one exception in 1 Timothy 2:8 where it means “gracious” or “kind.” The NIV Bible often uses the word “sacred” instead of “holy,” meaning the same thing.

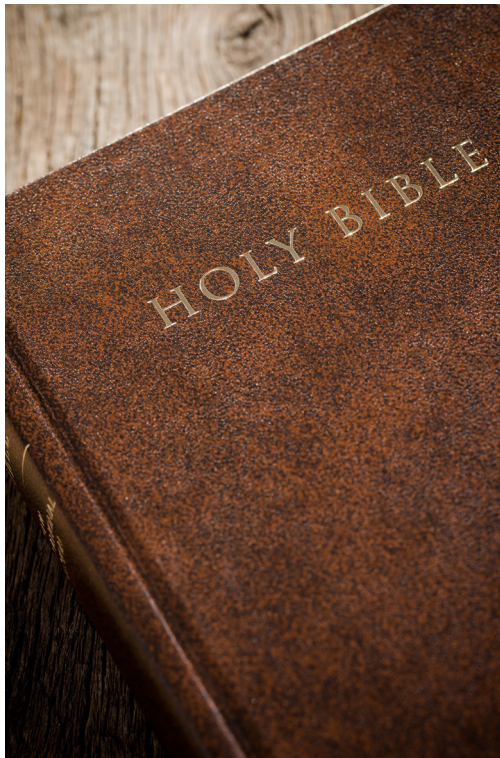
God is eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above and over all creation and flawless in character. All power, wisdom, and knowledge flow from him. His qualities make him uniquely separate from everything else. Therefore he is holy in every sense of the word. Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord seated on a throne with seraphim (a type of angels) saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty.”² In the original language when a word is repeated twice it is for emphasis, but when repeated three times, it indicates a superlative—no greater.

Angels are mentioned about 300 times in Scripture. “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.”³ The righteous angels are holy because they are set apart to serve God at his throne and us here on earth. They also are morally pure.

The Bible was first labeled holy in 1611 with the King James translation. But it was holy long before then. It is holy because of its origin and purpose—inspired by God and used by the Holy Spirit to transform our minds. It is uniquely separate from all other books.

What about “holy kiss?” “...Greet one another with a holy kiss.”⁴ It was customary to greet other Christians this way—a sign of mutual respect and love—men kissing men and women kissing women. It was not a romantic kiss, but separate as a morally pure expression of love for spiritual brothers and sisters. Today Christians acknowledge each other in other ways depending on the culture—shaking hands, or hugging.

How can the nation of Israel be holy? The Lord



separated Israel from all other nations, giving them Old Covenant laws that made them different—rules of diet, sacrifices, cleanliness, even clothing. They were to dedicate themselves to the Lord’s service. “I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.”⁵

Christians are holy

When God began the New Testament church, he called Christians to be spiritually separate, to be holy. “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar (distinct or set apart) people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”⁶

As Christians we are to separate ourselves from the sinful ways of the world, and to serve God—a much stronger relationship than Israel had under the Old Covenant. “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?”⁷ Christians are holy—set apart for God’s special use. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”⁸

God calls Christians to live and share the gospel, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”⁹ “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”¹⁰ “Imitators of God” means doing what Jesus did, telling of God’s grace and going out of the way to help hurting people. Wherever we live, we have the opportunity to emulate Jesus individually and collectively.

Christians are holy, not because of spiritual perfection, but because God has attributed Jesus’ perfect righteousness to us, sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, and chosen us from the rest of the world for his special use.

God also calls Christians to strive for moral pureness. Obviously we are easily beset with sin and can’t measure up to Jesus’ perfect holiness. But we should strive to follow his example—loving others and refraining from sinful conduct.

Thankfully the time is coming when God will transform us to fully conform to his likeness and moral purity. Until then, let’s strive to be holy.

By
Paul Hailey

- 1 1 Peter 1:16
- 2 Isaiah 6:3
- 3 Matthew 25:31
- 4 1 Corinthians 16:20
- 5 Leviticus 26:12
- 6 1 Peter 2:9
- 7 1 Corinthians 3:16
- 8 Romans 12:1
- 9 Ephesians 2:10
- 10 Ephesians 5:1, 2

Love Made Complete

With dread, I unlocked Mary's back door that opened into her kitchen. I pushed the door open as far as it would go and just stood there on the stoop taking it all in. I first noticed how dirty the floor was—not that I could see much floor. I could tell that the floor was a light-colored linoleum, but not much of the linoleum showed through the grime. On the right, dirty dishes and old food splatters covered the countertop and stove. On the left, were piles of, well, stuff, on top of the little café table and any other furniture that might have been in the kitchen. I say might have been because my brain couldn't compute what I was seeing. I simply saw stuff, mounds of it. Looking ahead was a narrow pig path that had been taken over by the stuff, much like kudzu takes over trees and abandoned shacks in the South. The path, which at this point was merely a depression in the mounds, ended at a broken recliner. Stunned, I carefully walked the path, turning sideways as the path narrowed. I was faced with wall-to-wall, hip high, grocery bags, gift bags, totes, and plastic tubs, piled on top of one another and filled with thrift store clothes, books and knickknacks. It was like a garbage dump, but, I suspect, even in a garbage dump there is order.

I was there to retrieve Mary's medicines, cell phone, important documents, and to pick up some clothes for her. As I searched, something squished under my foot. I uncovered a small Styrofoam tray wrapped in plastic food wrap. Whatever rotted vegetable or fruit that was in it had squirted when I stepped on it. Fortunately, the tray was upside down. The ick factor would have been so much worse had it been right-side up. With much distaste, I looked for the cell phone in the area Mary said she'd dropped it, but my efforts were half-hearted. It was obvious that the phone had been consumed by the debris. Disturbing the stuff would just make the phone sink further. I gave up on the cell phone and determined that getting to her bedroom for her clothes would cause a landslide and possible injury. The meds weren't where she said they were, but I did find a bag of papers at her recliner.

Why am I telling you this? Because nothing is too dirty or disgusting to show the love of God. Maybe I should start at the beginning.

Mary is an elderly woman who lived in affordable housing and has cancer. She's a Christian and at one time, years earlier, she attended our church. I became a chapter in her story, and she a part of mine, when Joe, a mutual acquaintance, asked for volunteers to take her an occasional meal, which I did.

Then Mary fell one day while bringing her groceries

By
Sondra Peters

in and couldn't get up or crawl for help. She was there, trapped by her possessions, for three days before the exterminator hired to spray for bugs found her. An ambulance was called and after recuperating in the hospital, she was sent to rehab, which was when I heard about her fall. I went to visit her, and she asked me to go to her apartment to retrieve some things that she needed.

Mary had hinted that she had a lot of stuff, but up until my visit to her home, I expected a hoarder's prized items to be in neatly stacked boxes.

I understand hoarding, but not to this degree. Perhaps growing up during lean times has brought Mary to this.

I purchased clothes for Mary to wear while she was in

rehab and I helped her get groceries and a new phone when she was released. Although she had been receptive to help in cleaning out and cleaning up her apartment while she was in rehab, as soon as she got home, she reverted to needing to hang on to her stuff. It seems that the items taking over her house were things she'd purchased from Good Will for her nieces and nephews who lived in another state. I gently told her that most people don't need or want more stuff, but she was not to be swayed and I knew not to push.

Several months passed. I kept in touch and helped her with groceries. Our conversations always took place outside on her porch.

Then she had another incident, but this time she couldn't get out of her recliner, which she slept in even though it no longer reclined. She was stuck for 15 hours until her mental health caseworker found her and sent her by ambulance to the hospital.

I visited her in the hospital, and she told me that I was right when I previously said that most people don't want or need more stuff. She said she had discovered that not only did her nieces and nephews--the only family she had left-- not want all the stuff she'd collected for them, they didn't want her.

Mary told me that she now realized that just because someone is a blood relative, it doesn't mean he or she is "family." As I listened to her, I also was thinking about a scripture I'd been chewing on for several days, 1 John 4:12. The whole chapter is about love, but verse 12 is the part that had caught my attention and held it.

"No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

How is God's love "made complete in us" or "perfected," as one translation puts it?

Continues on page 21



Deep Church



It was a sunny day. In the outside lane on the busy freeway, an expensive sports car, top down, raced along the road, passing everything in sight. The driver was busy. In his extended arm, he held a “selfie” stick out in front of him, taking photos of himself and his car, apparently oblivious to the rest of the road users and the potential danger he might cause to himself and others.

Hyper-individualism

“Hyper-individualism.” It’s the word used by researcher, author and well-known social commentator Hugh Mackay to describe the state of Australian society and the loss of community. Not just a focus on the self, but an active promotion of, even obsession with, “me” – my wants, thoughts, desires. My world. My life. What I had for breakfast, what I think of the coffee I am currently drinking and a growing assumption that everyone else must be as interested in me as I am.

Yet deep down, we know there is something seriously flawed with this. Deep in the human psyche, we know we need meaningful friendships, lasting relationships and deep connections. We know we need human contact, to love and be loved. At the abiding core of what it means to be human, we know we need one another.

This is why philosopher and author Alain de Botton writes that “one of the losses modern society feels most keenly is the loss of community”. As our society becomes increasingly technocratic, mobile, secularised, densely populated but increasingly fractured, “social isolation” – loneliness – is one of the biggest social problems in our nation. What an irony. An increasing focus on the self, and

By
John McLean

an accompanying increase in isolation and loneliness.

Theologian James Torrance is fond of reminding us that our view of God determines our view of ourselves, and indeed, of everything else. God dwells, in his very Being, in fellowship, communion. He has never been a lonely, isolated, solitary, aloof and separate being. God’s very existence is relational.

There is nothing mechanical, abstract, or impersonal about God. God, John tells us, is love. We were created for communion by the God whose very being is communion.

This is so fundamental we can’t afford to miss it, gloss over it, forget it, or move on to something else. Good theology starts with God, not with ourselves. When we start with ourselves, we get a skewed view of the gospel, and of life. Such an approach can leave us with a distorted theology that actually feeds hyper-individualism, rather than answering it. You may have come across the line that runs like this: I know God loves me. I am his beloved. I have the Holy Spirit! So I don’t really need you, or anybody else. I certainly don’t need church. All those difficult people! It’s all about me, and I’m okay in God.

This is partly true – you are beloved by God. But when we start with God, we see the obvious, unavoidable, ineluctable truth is that this means we share in the life and love of God – a love that is inclusive, that reaches out to others in grace and kindness. A love that indeed is self-emptying, service focused and other-centred. Nothing could run more against hyper-individualism than the other-centredness of God revealed in the Incarnation, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and brought to communal life in the creation of the church.

Easter and Pentecost

At Pentecost, God breathes life into the new creation of the church through the Spirit. The good news of Easter is followed by the good news of Pentecost. Pentecost is in fact the culmination of a season of celebration that begins with Easter. The two go together. The Spirit of the Risen Christ brings the church to life. This Holy Spirit creates the church, a communion of people in fellowship with God – and one another.

Jesus came from the inner life of God to show us who God is, and to save us – not just from sin, but for fellowship. God's purpose is sharing his life and love with humanity – with creating communion. And the church is part of this plan – “a long range plan, in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth” (Ephesians 1:6-10).

Mere-Church, Me-Church, or Deep Church

It's easy – fashionable, even – to dismiss church. After all, church is made up of other very imperfect people. And people are messy, have their faults and idiosyncrasies, and, let's be honest, are often difficult, complicated and hard to love. Why put up with that? In any given congregation there's usually a lot of diversity. People are different, think differently, have different opinions, are not necessarily “my” crowd.

So it's easy to condescend to church – Mere-Church – as a dysfunctional group of people who are sometimes judgmental, frequently boring and often apparently hypocritical. The church clearly has lots of weaknesses, faults and problems. It often fails to live up to its high calling. So, why bother?

Much easier to do Me-Church. Just me and God. With no one else to spoil it. No one else to put up with, be patient with, serve, be gracious to, or just plain tolerate. Just me and God, who loves me in spite of everything I do (or don't do). I can just sing the hymns I want to. Or not sing at all, if that is my prejudice. Sorry, preference.

Clearly, the Pentecost notion of church flies in the face of individualism, let alone hyper-individualism. C.S. Lewis coined the phrase Deep Church, which gets at understanding church from the inside, at the often-

hidden spiritual structures beneath the surface of things. There is always more going on than we see. We never see the church whole and complete. Deep church captures the concept of the Trinitarian realities at work from which the church is formed, from which your congregation draws life.

The Holy Spirit brings us into fellowship. Pentecost draws us out of isolation, separation, and into communion with the Father, Son and Spirit – and with one another. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of adoption, whereby we call God Father, Jesus Brother, and one another sisters and brothers. The Holy Spirit is always in relationship, creatively animating life and fellowship. So our life is life together, not life in isolation.

The church is not an accident of history, to be confined to an unenlightened past, but part of the divine plan of God. The church is not a wish-dream, a utopian society, or the Kingdom of God. Nor is it God's “Policeman” on earth to judge and punish sinners.

The Holy Spirit opens us up to be other-centred, as God is. That is, the Holy Spirit doesn't create a closed community of the church, but opens the church up to the whole world, in love and genuine care for all others. In the Spirit, the church's mission functions so that all may have access to the Father through Jesus (Ephesians 2:18).

Church is made up of congregations of ordinary people, with all their human faults and flaws, in and through whom Christ chooses to be present to the world. Church takes place in worship, baptism, Eucharist, but also in the ordinary stuff of everyday life – love, service, kindness, compassion. A smile to those who need it. Food for the needy. Help for the marginalised. Being a comfort, encouragement and edification to others.

Church gives expression to the nature of God. It is participating in his mission, his ministry, his work on earth. It is the place we learn to love one another, and all mankind, the way the Father, Son and Spirit love one another. It is the very antidote to hyper-individualism, loneliness and isolation.

At Pentecost we celebrate the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit's creation of Deep Church – of other-centred communion, participating in the life of the Triune God. So, celebrate the life of your congregation, and the other congregations that make up the Body of Christ. And share the Spirit of communion, grace and love when and wherever you can.

Continued from page 19

One theologian has made the point that the phrase “No one has ever seen God” is completely out of the blue, and seemingly out of context here. So, why does John bring it up? Because when the love of God in us flows out to others via our actions, we are revealing God to others. That's when His love is made complete.

Sitting there in the hospital by Mary's bed, I knew that what I'd done for Mary was out of a sense of obligation. Love had not been flowing out of me. I asked myself, “Would Jesus do more?” I knew without a doubt that Jesus would do more than what I'd done. He would do more than just take care of physical needs. He would show her affection and tenderness; He would show her that she mattered. The affection was the hard part for

me. I'd seen the filth she lived in, and I saw that filth still under her fingernails. I've read that what elderly people who live alone miss the most is the human touch. I made a point of holding her hand before I left that day. That may not seem like much to you, but it was a lot for me.

Jesus didn't just have great compassion for the demon possessed who were living as animals, or the unwashed with open sores, he healed them and in the process of healing them, he touched them. I can only imagine how much affection was in that touch.

In the months since then, I've continued to visit Mary in a nursing home. I've continued to ask myself, “Would Jesus do more?” That has been my guide. I want God's love in me to flow out to others so that they can see God.

Paul's Goodbye

Saying goodbye is one of few universal experiences in life—from the kid going to school to the soldier going to war to the father walking his daughter down the aisle. The oldest rituals discovered involve saying farewell, and with all our communication technology today, parting ways still hurts.

If you've ever had the honour of being at someone's bedside when they've gone to be with the Lord, you know every word is important. Any chaplain or doctor worth their salt will tell you that "saying goodbye" is a vital part of the process. Often someone who is about to die will, in some sense, wait for permission from those who love them. Even if it seems like they can't hear you or see you anymore, even if they haven't responded for days, that person will often wait until you say goodbye. Those moments are intimate, there's nothing flashy or dramatic about those moments, but they are drenched with meaning.

Here, we will look at Paul's goodbye to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18).

This is the last writing we have from Paul, and it shows up in a mysterious way. It has all the poignancy of a final scene in a movie, one where the main character we've grown to love appears one last time and we can't quite tell what's going on. But it's meaningful, even if we don't know exactly what's going on around the frame of the picture.

Different from most of Paul's writing, the circumstances are a little unclear. We know that Paul is imprisoned, again, but we don't know where. Is he under house arrest? Is he in the depths of a Roman prison somewhere? Or is he still under the same arrest he was when he wrote other letters? We don't know exactly, and in a sense, we don't need to know.

Paul has said all he needed to say. He's run the race, kept the course, finished the battle. He's delivered his message, and he's living now in the peace and freedom of a faithful servant at rest. This passage is a reflection on the art of finishing well, of crossing the finish line tired, but with the work complete.

Paul's last words to his "son in the faith" are intimate words between two friends: bring my coat, bring my books, send my love to our friends.

I want to share three points from this passage that Paul's goodbye gives us:

- Identity
- Purpose
- Doxology

First, we can see Paul's identity at work. Let's look at the passage and some of its context. First, verse 6:

As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. (2 Timothy 4:6 NRSV)

By
Grace
Communion
International

This is a strong image. In the Jewish community, when the sacrifices were finished, the last act was to pour a drink offering of wine over the carcasses of the animals. This is the "drink offering"—a dramatic picture of wine poured out and dripping down into the earth.

No doubt Paul's own execution isn't far from his mind. As a Roman citizen, he wouldn't have been thrown to the animals or crucified—he would have been beheaded. It was a "privilege" of citizenship—to have a quick and honourable death. The pouring blood was probably on Paul's mind—the last of him will be poured out, the work, at least his part of the work is done, and the last thing he has to give is himself.

The amazing other part of his discussion of identity comes toward the end of the chapter, toward the end of our reading today.

But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. (2 Timothy 4:17-18)

I love that Paul writes this just toward the end of the letter: "The Lord delivered me from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack." It doesn't seem like it! It looks to me like Paul is right there between the lion's teeth!

Paul is speaking here out of his identity in Christ. His identity, which transcends his circumstances, is in the royal courts of Christ and not in a dingy prison cell that reeks of death. He can talk in the same breath about his departure from this life (at the edge of a Roman sword) and of his deliverance.

His identity in Christ also transcends his loneliness, which is another strong theme here. Prisoners in that day had to depend heavily on the kindness of friends and family – there was no food provided for prisoners and no other supplies. We can assume Paul has enough food through some source to survive, just barely, but we see a profound moment of weakness where he asks Timothy for his coat (verse 13). He survived shipwrecks, snake bites, riots, stoning, kidnapping and other near misses, but now he is quite simply chilly.

We see his loneliness in verse 16:

At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me.

There was also no legal system for criminals in that day, especially someone of the lower middle class, like Paul most likely was. He's on trial, awaiting execution, he doesn't have a team of defense attorneys at hand. There are no court-appointed lawyers.

He was utterly, completely alone. Prison can be one of the loneliest places in the world. Even if you are surrounded by other people, everybody's just trying to

Continues on page 23

It was not the Fall of Adam, therefore, that set God's agenda; it was the decision to share the great dance with us through Jesus. Adam's plunge certainly threatened God's dreams for us, but that threat had been anticipated and already strategically overcome in the predestination of the incarnation. Jesus Christ did not become human to fix the fall; he became human to accomplish the eternal purpose of our adoption, and in order to bring our adoption to pass, the Fall had to be called to a halt and undone....Jesus is not a footnote to Adam and his Fall; the Fall, and indeed creation itself, is a footnote to the purpose of God in Jesus Christ.

When you start with legal holiness, you have eyes only for the cross, and you never see that in Jesus Christ, nothing less than the eternal trinitarian life of Father, Son and Spirit is being lived out inside human existence. You never really get the staggering

meaning of the incarnation."

Justification has so dominated the landscape of Christian thought that adoption has been marginalized. We don't hear much about our adoption at all. We hear a lot about forgiveness, but very little about the staggering reality of our inclusion in Jesus' relationship with his Father in the Spirit.

That is the best picture of what the incarnation means when we look at it in its true context. For that is what happened in Jesus Christ from his birth to his resurrection. The Son of God entered into our broken, Fallen, alienated human existence. He took upon himself our fallen flesh. He stood in Adam's shoes, in Israel's shoes, in our shoes, and he steadfastly refused to be Adam, He refused to be Israel. He refused to be what we are.

The Lamb of God, slain by Adam's race, lives now inside our abyss of shame, and is not swallowed by it: the light shines in our

darkness, and our darkness cannot overcome it. This is our hope.

The ones who are lost are not the sinners who are listening to Jesus, but the religious people who have no problems, at least in their own minds.

C. Baxter Kruger

Instead of judging people, why don't you take that same time to pray for them, to reach out to them, to let them know that you believe in them.

Our decisions don't just affect us, they affect our family, our children, and our friends. If you don't do the right thing for yourself, at least do it for your children, do it for your family.

Joel Osteen

Continued from page 22

survive. In the kind of desperate situation Paul was in, there's no one looking out for you. Except...

But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

The Lord stood by me and gave me strength. Paul was not alone, because he's never alone. His identity transcends space and time, and the company of Christ transcends his dim surroundings. There's nowhere he can go that Christ isn't there first, and where Christ won't keep him company.

Isn't that a promise? Isn't that an amazing thing we see here in Paul's goodbye? There's nowhere you can go outside the companionship of Christ. Even to prison, where you can hear your executioners laughing drunkenly outside your window—even there the Lord stands by you and gives you strength. How do we live our lives differently if we know Jesus is standing there with us always?

Second, Paul's goodbye tells us about his purpose. One of the Paul's characteristic flourishes appears in the beginning of our reading for today:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

Typical of Paul, this is a metaphor salad: four metaphors in just a handful of words. He hearkens back to some of the metaphors he developed earlier in the letter. He talked about his work, not Timothy's work, being like an athlete in training, a farmer at his work, and a soldier following orders. He collapses these metaphors in this

statement: I've finished what was set out for me to do. I've run the race, I've carried out my orders.

Completion is essential for Paul, and one of Paul's themes: "He who begun a good work in you will bring it to completion." The picture, at least Paul's part of it, is complete.

There's a touching scene in the movie "Meet Joe Black" where Anthony Hopkins' character is giving his birthday speech. The character knows his death is coming very soon. In his parting birthday toast he says, "I'm going to break precedent and tell you my one candle wish: that you would have a life as lucky as mine, where you can wake up one morning and say, 'I don't want anything more.'"

I don't want anything more. Here is the beauty of Paul's goodbye when it comes to purpose—he can look around at menacing guards and bars on the windows and say, "I don't want anything more." I've obeyed Christ and I know Christ, and that's enough.

Finally, we notice Paul's doxology—his liturgical praise to God.

To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:18)

It's like Paul is saying, don't worry about me. Don't focus on my circumstances, focus on the One I focus on. To God be the glory forever and ever.

There are no greater last words to leave to a disciple, a child, a spouse, a student, a friend. I've done what God has called me to do. I am ready for my reward. Let's not focus on my demise; let's focus on his goodness. To him belongs all the glory. Amen and amen.

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